Harris County Archives
Houston, Texas

Oral History Collection

#2

An Interview with J. E. (Mac) McCain

Place of interview:	Houston, Texas
Interviewer:	Sarah Canby Jackson
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Approved:	J. E. McCain (Signature)
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Persons Mentioned in OH2 – J. E. “Mac” McCain

(Page numbers refer only to the first time the person is mentioned)

Oral History Transcription
OH02 - J. E. "Mac" McCain
March 24, 2005

Tape 1 Side A

SARAH CANBY JACKSON: This is Sarah Canby Jackson interviewing J. E. "Mac" McCain for the Harris County Archives Oral History Program. The interview is taking place on March 24, 2005, in Houston, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. McCain in order to obtain his recollections concerning Harris County government in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Mac, what were your parent's names?

J. E. "MAC" McCAIN: Ed McCain and Pearl McCain.

JACKSON: Where were you born?

McCAIN: In Anniston, Alabama

JACKSON: What date?

McCAIN: April 3, 1928.

JACKSON: Describe your family to me.

McCAIN: There were my mother and father and I had three brothers. That was it.

JACKSON: And where did you fit in with the three?

McCAIN: I was the baby. The youngest.

JACKSON: What age separation was there between y'all?

McCAIN: My next brother was eight years older than me. The next one after that was four, I think it's four years, and then there was a year and a half, two years between the top two.

JACKSON: So there was a big range of ages between y'all. What was your father's job? What did he do for a living?

McCAIN: He worked for a lumber company. They had a big mill there and they brought in logs to the sawmill. There was a planing company where they cut the lumber into two by fours, or whatever size that they wanted. I remember he inventoried the materials that were waiting to be sold and orders that were going out, he knew all about all of those. As a matter of fact, when a load of logs would come in, he could estimate just looking at it what it was and after they made the measurements, he'd be correct. He could walk through the stockpile and just glance and decide how many two by fours they had and different sized lumber. There are a lot more different types of lumber, but he had good knowledge.

JACKSON: That's quite a talent. What was it like growing up in Anniston during the Depression?

McCAIN: Well it was pretty rough. My father worked all the time. He was able to work but you didn't make much money. Some of our neighbors and friends were out of jobs. But Anniston, the way it was laid out in square blocks with alleyways going down the back of the houses, which in turn would form an open area in the middle of the block. So therefore, the families were going out there and plowing and planting seeds, raising food; it was a cooperative effort for everybody to raise food there and you reaped the food.

JACKSON: So there were communal gardens.

McCAIN: Yes. Like I say he didn't make much money, but it was amazing, my mother always would cook on Saturdays. She cooked on Saturdays and that was the day I

got hotdogs. We made them there at the house for lunch, and of course it was easy to make and I didn't interfere with her cooking, and she'd have it all ready and set it out and have it ready for Sunday at noon. We had a table that would seat about eighteen or twenty. And we would usually have enough (to fill the table) between everybody, cousins and inviting friends to come by. We had a small table that the children had to sit at, and when you became trained well enough to eat at the big table they would try you out. And I remember my brother next to me; the one who is eight years older, when they tried him out the first day he got so excited, and he would just talk and talk and talk. Mother was reaching over at him, sitting right to her right; she'd reach over and pinch him. And finally he looked at her and said, "Momma, if you don't quit pinching me I'm gonna stick you with my fork." And man, back to the little table he went.

Anyway there was that, there was WPA work going on there, and some buildings being done by the WPA. Maybe that was on the recovery side of the Depression, when Roosevelt wanted to get things going. Everybody that I knew around there or can remember around there was a staunch Democrat, and Roosevelt was God to them and you better not say anything about him. Just outside of Anniston there was a large fort, Fort McClellan, and it always had soldiers based there, and sometimes I guess training was going on there. But that added to the economy of Anniston. The other thing, Anniston was the capital of the soil pipe business. They made more soil pipe for sewer lines and so forth there, than any place in the world. But since the plastic PVC has come in, it's just a ghost town as far as that's concerned.

JACKSON: So this was clay pipe that they were making?

McCAIN: It was a soil, yes.

JACKSON: Red clay pipe?

McCAIN: No, it winds up not being red; it was black, for sewer lines. Anyway, they had cornered the market on that. I can remember seeing the workers. I'd walk down the railroad tracks and look in and all the fire going on, smoke and heat and all, looking at those men in there and they would have on a T-shirt and their pants but they'd be just filthy with a dark, it was a clay that was for making the molds. And they'd be covered in that, and I'd look at that and say, "Man, I hope I never have to work there." But, there was talk about how I'll probably graduate and work in the pipe shop, and I didn't really like that.

Anniston was between Birmingham and Atlanta, so it was a pretty good lay-over point for the trains -- the Southern going between Atlanta and Birmingham and on down to New Orleans. So that was pretty good. And then the L&N Railroad came in from the north to the south, Southern went from the east to the west or west to the east, whichever one. Growing up I do remember bad times when a lot of times Momma would take just the salt pork and fry it to a crisp. We would have that but then she cooked those biscuits and we'd even soak that in the grease to eat that. But she always, usually always, had something like sweet potatoes, or tea cookies, they're large cookies, under the table cloth in the center of the table, mainly to keep the flies off of it. You walked by there and pick up sweet potato and peel it and eat it. There was always something like that around.

But getting back to the Sunday lunches or dinner, they called it dinner but it was actually lunchtime, after church. Momma always had plenty of vegetables for everybody and would have at least two meats and pies, cakes, and stuff like that. I can't remember the times when we didn't have a pretty good spread like that. And a lot of the people that were invited didn't have too much and they wanted a good meal like that.

So therefore I can't say that I really suffered very much but Momma kept me in knickers up until I was twelve years old. And my brother, eight years older than me, was working and making money and he bought me my first dress suit that I ever had. He told her he didn't want to see me in those knickers anymore. And you have to get them worn, the knees in them worn and all that, and every pair I had had patches on them. And sweaters, or not sweaters, but little jackets, they all had patches on them. I can remember back to that first suit and I can't find a suit similar to that now, but I really loved that suit. I wore that for a good, long time there and just kept wearing it.

JACKSON: What was your schooling like?

McCAIN: Well, I went to an elementary school which wasn't far from the house – one, two, three, about four or five blocks. One of the main things I can remember, and it's vivid in my mind, was in the first grade we were sitting at tables, all of us kids, anyway the teacher was out of the room, and I was cutting up with some of the other kids and I was up on the table dancing when she walked back in and took me by the arm and carried me back to the cloak room and paddled me. So I learned my lesson there. A lot of the other times at the elementary school I couldn't remember.

But, she was the wife of the vice principal at high school, and her name was Nash and his name was Nash, naturally, Johnny Nash. So he was assistant principal but he also taught certain classes. So if you were sent out of the room in high school the teacher would give you a note and you'd have to go see him. When you walked in that classroom, the very first time you walked in, you thought you were going to sit down, he says, "No, that's not the way it's played here. You go stand in that corner until I get through with this class." So when he got through with the class, he'd give you the opportunity of three days out of school, or three licks. You knew if you got three days out of school and your dad found out about it, he's gonna whip you worse. So you'd take three. I took the three licks from Johnny Nash. With the paddle he had, he'd make you bend over and hold on to your ankles, and have a tight fit on you, and he'd hit you three times, and you really felt that. But the irony, what I'm getting at, is that the only time I was only disciplined like that was by his wife and by him. And it just seemed ironic that they got me in the first grade and I think I was in the ninth or tenth grade when he got me.

JACKSON: Why didn't you graduate?

McCAIN: Well I was 16 years old. I had two older brothers, the one eight years older than me, and the next one, they were overseas fighting. The first oldest brother was running the Anniston Water Department and they were furnishing water to Fort McClellan and all around there and he was exempt from being drafted. They said he was more important there. But the two older brothers that were fighting overseas, my mother would carry on about "they were fighting over there for me," and if she wanted me to work in the flower beds, I should be happy to work in the flower beds.

Or I should be happy to go wash those clothes or I should be happy to go do those dishes, and all that. All the sudden I decided, well I'm going to see what I can do. I had originally hoped to graduate from high school, go to Georgia Tech -- of course, I had older people that I knew that had done things like that -- and then become an aviator. But that all went to pot when I went in the Merchant Marine.

JACKSON: You were under age.

McCAIN: Yes.

JACKSON: How is it that you got into the Merchant Marine?

McCAIN: If you were sixteen you needed your parent to sign for you. But also in that small town, and knowing the District Attorney, Sheriff, and all -- I played with the Sheriff's boys and went to school with them -- I knew the layout of everything and I knew where the birth certificates were. So I went in and changed the birth certificate, then ordered one. I changed it to 1924, then I used that. Right up close to time for me to leave, it came out and mother was fussing and raising Cain, and my dad said, "Well my God, if he wants to get away that bad, I'll go sign for him." And so he went down and signed for me to go.

JACKSON: Why did you choose the Merchant Marine?

McCAIN: That was the only thing I could get in, education-wise and age-wise.

JACKSON: Even with your falsified birth certificate?

McCAIN: Well, the Merchant Marine I felt I wouldn't have as much explaining to do, and really I didn't think that was too much Federal Government. The Merchant Marine, during the time of the war, had the same status as being in the service. Anyway, I just felt it'd be easier, that's the only thing I could think of. I didn't get involved with the

military like the Navy, or anything. Or Army, I didn't particularly care for the Army, I'd rather to have had the Navy. And the Marine Corps, I knew I didn't want all that training, because that was, I was too lazy for all that or in my mind I thought I was. They first shipped me on a bus to Birmingham, then we took the train to St. Petersburg, Florida, to train in the maritime service. I was there about six weeks.

JACKSON: What year was this?

McCAIN: That was in 1944. And then they had a graduation trip you could go on before you shipped. They put you on a ship, and you went to say, New Orleans, or Mobile, Alabama, and we stayed there. I got on one ship and it was a Panamanian ship, but they had to keep them moving and that wasn't a very good ship for me and I made up my mind I wasn't going to get on another Panamanian ship.

JACKSON: Why was that not a good ship?

McCAIN: Just the conditions and all. It was horrid living quarters, and it was just so crowded and all. The captain took over the officer's mess where they ate, and the officers had the crew's mess, and we had to line up on deck and get a plate or can of food and eat the best way we could. It was just atrocious, but fortunately I got on an American ship after that, out of New Orleans.

JACKSON: Didn't you tell me you almost were assigned to a second Panamanian ship?

McCAIN: Yes, see if you signed articles, and you left, you couldn't jump ship. But when I went aboard, the captain held my passport. I went aboard and was waiting to sign articles before the ship left. I wanted to get my papers back, and he wouldn't do it, because I didn't want to get on there. When I walked onboard, I'd been told it would be better than the one I was on before, and it wasn't. It was a lot worse, or about the

same. Anyway, I threw my sea bag -- I was up forward, my quarters were forward -- on the dock. I got to a place, and they were coming and were going to try to hold me, and I jumped off the ship onto the dock, and that was a pretty good jump, and then I was hollering that they were trying to kidnap me and all that kind of stuff. And so, when security came down they put a stop to it and I got my papers back and I told them, "I ain't signing articles, I don't want to go on that ship." So they got everything back for me.

JACKSON: And then your third ship was an American ship.

McCAIN: Yes.

JACKSON: Now, before you talk about that, what job did you do in the Merchant Marine?

McCAIN: Well, I could either be a fireman or an oiler. A fireman you worked the boilers, and an oiler you oil the equipment, the engines. What we had back then were all reciprocating engines and it took a lot of going around and oiling, keeping everything in shape. The first ship I went on was a Liberty ship which they were building real fast here in the country. It was a triple expansion engine and one thing about that in the North Atlantic that might be of interest, on that ship we didn't have a governor, there was no such thing as a governor on the engine. Consequently, when the bow would go up in that stormy weather, we'd be going up, they had a quick shut off valve, it was just a lever, you would pull that, stop all steam from going to the engine, because the stern of the ship was going to come up next. You had to get synchronized with it. Because if you was out of synchronization, that stern would just be shaking that ship, and you'd think it was going to shake it apart. And of course the Captain then would be yelling from the bridge. We called that the Butterfly Watch. And it

was, the name of it was a butterfly valve, I don't know where it got that, but anyway it was just a quick shut off valve to keep the engines from spinning so much and shaking the ship.

On other ships I was on, were turbine ships that had governors and I was on a diesel ship, the *M.S. Cape Fairweather* and went to the Pacific area and came back to the North America to Clatskanie, Oregon. But that had, it was a twin diesel and it was just real easy to operate and maneuver. And being an oiler there wasn't very much to do. Sometimes I would be pressed into doing an engineer's job since they didn't have many qualified people. In that case, I'd be classified as sailing on the Chief Engineer's license. Anyway, that was pretty good and because I spent time in the North Atlantic War Zone, and time in the Pacific War Zone, I was categorized in a bill that Congress passed making us Veterans, so I am now a Veteran. But that didn't happen until a good number of years after the war was over.

JACKSON: Your third ship, the first one was Panamanian, and that went to South America. Do you remember what you were hauling?

McCAIN: I think we hauled some coal. With that ship we just went to Cuba. We hauled some commodities there, and then went back to Antilla, Cuba, and loaded up some boxide and brought it back.

JACKSON: And then you were able to leave that ship.

McCAIN: Yeah.

JACKSON: And you were lucky to get off the second Panamanian, and then your third was the American ship.

McCAIN: Yes, the *John G. Whittier*.

JACKSON: Do you want to describe that voyage?

McCAIN: I shipped out of New Orleans on that, but the ship itself was docked at Port Sulfur, Louisiana, down at the mouth of the Mississippi, and it was taking on a load of sulfur to Hull, England. And of course we were in the North Atlantic and going in convoys. There were some bad instances there of ships nearly running into each other; it's hard in the North Atlantic to keep the ship in line.

And I remember one thing about that trip though, there was an old boy that had gone to sea for years but the war scared him off from going to sea, and finally he decided he'd come back and that was his first trip. And every time you'd hear bombs, torpedoes hitting ships, and noise, and you'd hear something going on, we were below, in the engine room, we were below the waterline. And all you could do was look up and see that a torpedo had hit above you, and you weren't going anyplace. And he'd get scared and run up topside. Every time we got into those problems, he'd run off and I was on the same ship with him. And the engineer on duty -- the Captain told him -- shoot him the next time he deserted his post. Of course that never came about; you can't just really do that. But that was the irony of that trip, where he was so scared.

They were always talking about getting seasick and the irony of it, I never did get seasick. Although, I would take a lemon and sort of suck on a lemon from time to time but some guys got so seasick, it was pitiful. And this guy got seasick too, real bad.

In Hull, England, we had unloaded and we were going to ship the ship in the harbor and go over and take on ballast, that's old material, rubble from all the

bombed out cities, and load that on our ship. But the ship, being empty, was riding high and somehow the Pilot and the Captain turned it and the propeller hit the concrete dock. It bent about ten inches off of the tip of the propeller. Then we had to go into drydock and they cut that tip, they couldn't get another propeller, for us, and they cut the tip off that, off each blade. Consequently, it slowed us down to about four knots an hour and they wouldn't let us come back in the convoy because they didn't want the convoy slowed down that much for us, so we had to come back to the states by ourselves. And that was a little nerve wracking, but nothing really happened except when we got back. Boston had submarines around and we had to bypass, go down to New York and go back. There was a peninsula sticking out, and they had a canal through there, well it's called Buzzard's Bay, Buzzard's Bay Canal, go through there to get to Boston. At one time they had sunk a submarine in the North Atlantic. When we got there I looked down and these German sailors were holding their arms up, they'd already frozen, and hear them . . . well, there was just one that I heard bump against the ship, and that was awful. You tried to throw the lifeline to them but they couldn't even move to try to catch it.

JACKSON: They were still alive but their bodies were frozen?

McCAIN: No, I think they were already dead and frozen. They couldn't do anything.

Scenes like that will stay with you. You remember. It was very vivid.

JACKSON: Well, I think you were saying, too, that when you were at Hull, it was bombed.

McCAIN: I was…they had what they call the buzz bombs…

JACKSON: What are those?

McCAIN: Those were bombs that the Germans created and they were just like a rocket ship, they weren't manned, but they'd shoot them across, you could hear the noise. As long as it was going you were all right, but all the sudden if that noise cut out, stopped, you no longer….that was a weird feeling, and it just came down where it was. So they couldn't put it on target, there was nothing like that, it was just to aggravate the British or English people.

At Hull I was in on the last German air raid where their fighter planes and bombers were coming over to bomb Hull. Going back to the ship one night, this plane was coming over shooting, and by the tracers and all you could see, and it looked like those gunshots were coming right at me, but they weren't. But I thought, I felt like they were, and I grabbed the Jacobs ladder and one of them rolled over across the gunwale to the deck of the ship, and anyway that passed. But that was the last raid that they had in England.

My brother was reminding me of that the other day. He was with the Eighth Air Force while I was in Hull. Where he was stationed was highly secretive because I think it was what you called "the pathfinder" and it was supposed to be highly secret. And as a smart aleck kid, when I'd write him, I'd be looking at that map, and before I left home, I'd mention different things about this or that, and I was thinking he might could write me back and say, "Yeah, you hit something." But I never did get anything like that, but he also told me that, and they were censoring his letters real strong, somehow ….

[Telephone rings, interruption]

The military, they were censoring my brother's letters to me after that, and they were censoring my letters. And he told me sometimes he would get a letter from me and it was all chopped up. Sentences taken out and words taken out and all. But anyway I was just a smart aleck kid thinking I was playing little detective, I was going to search and find where he was. I knew when I found out where we were going; I was going to have an opportunity to get with him.

I met this lady at the American Red Cross but she was British, and she was a volunteer. And she started pulling some of her strings and she was high enough, her husband was pretty high in the Government there, I don't know really what he was, but I'd go out to their house. We'd all go out to her house sometimes, especially when we were there so long in dry dock. So she got hold of rank, my brother got a pass and came up, took the train to Hull, and I was at the station and met him there, and boy we were elated to see each other.

We wanted to go sightseeing, but I couldn't go because I had to stay close to the ship even though we were dry-docked like that, and we couldn't get ready to sail in twenty-four hours, I was on twenty-four hour call. Anyway I had this Norwegian Captain, so I had to get the permission of my Captain, I had to get permission of the American Consulate, and the British Consulate, and I had a piece of paper that all of them had to sign off on. And so every place I went, they would give me the story, "Well we can't do that unless somebody else signs it, but we won't sign it." So, I went back to the captain and I snowed him so good about him being so important and all, that he was the most important thing, and that they just insisted that he sign it and know that it was all right with him for me to leave the ship. I got through with my

little story, he signed that thing. I took it back to the other, I think I went to the British, and I was telling them that my Captain felt that they were so important and all, and all that kind of stuff, and they signed it. Then I had two signatures, went on over to the American, and I don't see why you have a problem, two of them have already signed it. And I'm just a little old 17 -18 year old kid, but back then I looked older than my age. Anyway, I got that signed and I was supposed to have it stamped in every city that I went in, but I was restricted from going to London, for some reason, I don't know why.

My brother had some buddies and they commandeered a Colonel's command car, I think he'd gone back to the states for a little bit, so they got this command car and we were traveling all over England and going to the little old villages -- we just went and did. If it's convenient during the day, I'd go and get my paper stamped. And then one time, we grabbed a train and went to Leeds, England, my brother and I. That was really some enjoyable time, punk kid like me being able to see him. At first when I got there I didn't see there was any way, it was all restrictions, and I didn't know how I'd ever find him. But that lady, her name was Amy Penrose; I can still remember her name.

JACKSON: Which brother was this?

McCAIN: That was the one that was just eight years older than me.

JACKSON: What's his name?

McCAIN: Duval.

JACKSON: After your ship was repaired, you headed back across the Atlantic alone.

McCAIN: Yes.

JACKSON: Were you carrying anything or just ballast?

McCAIN: Just ballast.

JACKSON: And then you went to Boston?

McCAIN: Boston.

JACKSON: To pick up a load there?

McCAIN: No, I got off the ship there. And we, I stayed there and worked. You had to keep the ship going, but I signed off my articles, and then I stayed there on a daily pay to have transfer and all. But I didn't want to go on that ship again. And consequently, I really wanted to go to New Orleans. So I got on a train out of Boston to New York going to New Orleans. And I was going to catch a ship there. But that was when the Roosevelt died. I didn't change trains in New York, I went on the same one to Washington, D.C., but in New York people started piling on the train all excited like they were officials and had to get to Washington, they had these papers that the President had died, President Roosevelt. So we went on to Washington and I stayed in the station until my next train, it was a Southern, went all the way to New Orleans. But, it also went through Anniston, Alabama. Going down to the countryside there was guards at all the crossings and even the crosswalks, the trails across the tracks, there guards all up and down and we were looking at them. Anyway we had orders then, somewhere along the line, I really don't remember where it was, we had to stop the train, get off, and stand at attention while his train passed. And that was, you know, it was really something to see that.

And then I went on, got back on the train and went on to, went to Anniston, of course I got off at Anniston. That was one of my main reasons for wanting to go to

New Orleans because I knew the train goes through Anniston and I'd be able to get off there and visit for awhile. And then I went to New Orleans and got on the *M. S. Cape Fairweather*. We went down to this little old town on the river, Bellchase, Louisiana, and loaded bombs. And the idea for the bombs was that we were a fast ship, and we would run, go to Saipan unescorted, and carry this load of bombs. They were mainly for Saipan and Tinian. So we got through the canal, and got across to Saipan and we just anchored there. Just shortly after that, we heard that the Enola Gay had used the atomic bomb. Then we became just a warehouse, they never unloaded the bombs and we had deck cargo, it was those LCVP -- a landing craft vehicle personnel -- we had them on.

JACKSON: The ones that they manufactured in New Orleans?

McCAIN: Yea, they put them on deck for us to carry over there in case they needed them used for a landing. We never did unload those. What we had to do was we went out to sea a little bit. First we chopped holes in the hull. Went out and then we dumped them over the side. And needless to say some of the officers there were smart enough to take the diesel engines out and then salvage them, lash them down on the deck. And what they did with those they knew there was a shortage of them back in the states, these diesel engines. So, something happened, we brought them back to the States. I surmised they sold them. Because we anchored in Puget Sound, and the boat came out and picked them up, carried them over to an island where this truck was waiting for them I heard, I don't know. Anyway, stuff like that happened. But, I imagine they made some good money off those diesel engines. At that time though, and at Saipan after the war was over, they were shoving, going to the cliffs, just

shoving planes, all kinds of material into the ocean -- tanks, all, everything, just pushing. They did not want to bring them back. We went out to sea one day, and our small ammunition, our guns, we unloaded all that at sea and dumped it.

End Tape 1 Side A

Begin Tape 1 Side B

JACKSON: But you brought your bombs back to the country?

McCAIN: And we had to bring the bombs back to the country.

JACKSON: You were talking about bumming rides on B-52's.

McCAIN: Yes, I would bum rides, fly down to Guam, just for the heck of it. I had a ship, pretty good quarters, bed and all, pretty good food and all down there too. I'd fly back and forth like that every once in a while. And one time I flew to Guam and we were on twenty-four sailing notice at Saipan on the ship. And when I got to Guam after we landed they closed the landing fields. There weren't going to be any planes in or out for a good period of time. Talk about being nervous, I was scared to death, and me being down there on such short call from the ship. But I made my way around and I met this guy, that is why I was always lucky, I would meet some guy, and this guy says, "Wait a minute," he was a Captain, "you know I take the mail up there. You be up there a certain period of time. I've got to take off and take the mail up there, come on." So, I went with him. We took off from out there and he got me back to Saipan. While I was looking out I was so happy to see that ship still sitting there. I would have been up for desertion, other wise.

JACKSON: How long where you in Saipan?

McCAIN: We got there in August, I think, that was when Hiroshima was, in August. But anyway, I was there until the next March and we came back to the States. Then we had to wait in the States for a long time to be unloaded and we just stayed anchored out in Puget Sound.

JACKSON: Why was that?

McCAIN: They were bringing so many back, you had to be in rotation to get unloaded. So then we went to the Columbia River, went up to Clatskanie, Oregon, and unloaded there. Quite often the longshoremen would run into bombs that had this paper or cardboard wrapped around the bombs to cushion them and they'd find some that were burned and they would holler that it was dangerous. They'd leave ship and it would take a while to get them back on the ship. But they were making time anyway but they would use that as an excuse. So we would have a lot of scares like that. I kept thinking that was caused by friction with the bombs rolling around and coming back in the North Pacific we were in some real bad storms. But anyway, that was where that friction would cause those fires on that paper on that cardboard around those bombs. Then after that I left Clatskanie and Portland.

JACKSON: Were you still in the Merchant Marine?

McCAIN: Being in the Merchant Marine I could have still been in there, I could probably go back now. Because you got your papers and there's one important paper, the lifeboat ticket. You got it and that is where you are proficient in operating a life boat. I had that and a lot of times just ordinary times on going to work if they needed a certain compliment of sailors to have the life boat ticket. You were just about always in the Merchant Marines, cause I got my papers and all and I could go back to sea.

JACKSON: So you don't sign up for a specific period of time?

McCAIN: No, the only time you sign up is when you go on ship and sign articles for that trip and then you are hooked for that trip until you come back and sign articles signing off. There is no specific time that you are there and you can come and go as you please and which I did. I was on some coastal ships that were to go down to the West Coast, go through the canal and come up to Chester, Pennsylvania. I made that trip a couple of times. I forget the name of that ship even.

But I do know something memorable; in 1947 I was in New Orleans on the *High Flyer*. When they were in port, the union would just furnish men to do the standby work, be aboard ship just in case something would happen. It relieves the crew. So, I would do that standby work in port from time to time and I went out to the *High Flyer* and I was there and I was thinking about signing on, in the next few days it was going to leave. I think it was in dry dock at the time, I'm sure it was. Anyway, I was going to leave, I was going to sign articles but the Captain was real young and I was on night duty and he was inebriated and smart aleck and all, and we got into a little discussion. He was pretty obnoxious and I said, "I'm not sailing on this ship." So I just got off the next day. Which I could, you could come and go as you please because I didn't sign any articles. I went back to Portland, Oregon. I took the bus and went to Portland, Oregon, got on an intercoastal ship there, and I was going through the Canal again when I heard about the Texas City Explosion. The *High Flyer* had ran camp first and the *High Flyer* was the second one to blow up. I just think how lucky I was that I got into that argument with that Captain and I didn't

sign articles on there. Of course every time I hear about Texas City Explosion I think about me and the *High Flyer,* how lucky I was.

Anyway, about that time I was a little tired of being on those ships, of course I liked my shore life better. In Portland I went ashore and got a little place to live and went to work for the Union Pacific Railroad at what they call out-bound terminal. It was on the Swan Island, it was not really an island but a peninsula but part of it went on out to become like an island. That is where the Kaiser (Henry J. Kaiser) built a lot of the Liberty Ships. I worked, I was an inspector, car inspector and a car man. I was working in the shops a lot, a lot of my time there, it lasted a couple of years.

JACKSON: Tell me what an inspector and car inspector does?

McCAIN: As a car inspector you inspect the trains going out or coming in for mechanical and safety appliance defects. If you spot any, especially mechanical, if it is serious enough you have to have the car removed from the train right away. But safety appliance, if it is a safety appliance that freight car could not move from there, it had to go to the first repair place joint or space that you got, which would be our repair yard. But we had that, we called that the rip track and that was for light repairs, and then in Portland we had another big shop where we were rebuilding cars, freight cars. There'd be just a chain of them and they'd be working on them and you'd might do something for a couple of hours and then you'd get out of the way and they'd pull the line; you'd do the same thing. I worked there on a rivet crew and I was pretty good at that. You had a guy heating the rivets and you had what they call a sticker who would catch them and stick them in that hole and then you had a back up on the other side, and then you had a riveter so there was four of you. I became pretty good. I

could drive. I could have that rivet gun right or left hand. You get in a cramp or bad situation sometime or you might not get to it unless you change hands and then I could do that. Or, I could buck a rivet, the riveters driving it you call that bucking the rivet.

I did that for a good while, a few years, then all of a sudden with the weather the way it was up there I just got disgusted. I thought I would go back to Anniston to see what was going on there. I knew I didn't want to work in the pipe shop back there, but I thought something else might come about, so I went back there and nothing was going on. I left there and went to New Orleans. I was going to try to ship out of New Orleans, but shipping at that time was a little rough because there was not that much freight going.

JACKSON: About what time was this?

McCAIN: That would have been about 1948 or 1949. Well, anyway, I was trying to get a job in New Orleans and while it's not a union really, I guess it's union country now, it was not much but they had a better union because if you weren't from New Orleans you didn't get a job there. I'd try and try and try, but what was happening I was renting I had some money left over from the War, but also I was going through it pretty fast too.

I rented from a retired professor at Tulane University and he was just three houses from the campus and I lived on Freret Street. Anyway, that was quite interesting, catching a street car and all that moving around there. At that particular time, the street car fare was seven cents and I had a nickel in my pocket and I was out on Airline Drive looking for a job and so I'd say, "Well, I got a walk, it's a long walk,

not enough to ride the street car." With the seven cents fare, you could get a transfer and you know, so anyway I'd say, "I am going to have to walk." I had that nickel in my pocket and that was not enough to do anything with. I just put it in a slot machine and I think I got about two dollars. Talk about being happy, I took the street car and stopped and got me weenies and bread and mayonnaise and all and I just cooked those weenies and pork-n-beans, had me a good meal off that.

But another thing during the war, these shipping companies would make mistakes on your pay sometimes and after that the Government, everybody would be in audit. I would get a check in the mail sometimes for, it might be a dollar or two, and sometimes it was several hundred dollars. I had another occasion I was down and broke and I went in and the mail was there and I think that check was about three dollars. I went down and cashed that and I loaded up again on weenies and pork-n-beans and bread and mayonnaise. Anyway, my brother lived in San Antonio and he sent me thirty dollars to get out of Houston to come there.

JACKSON: To get out of Houston or New Orleans?

McCAIN: I mean, I'm sorry, that was New Orleans, to come over there with him, so I went over. The old Missouri Pacific Railroad is now the IGN Railroad, they had a shop out there and I went out there and I went to work. In San Antonio I did not have much seniority; I was low man on the totem pole. But at Taylor, a man I think had retired and anyway they needed somebody while they were going through the bidding process for that station. And they sent me up there and they forced me to go up there. Well, I was on salary and the room rent and food and all I was doing pretty good up there. It turned out that at Taylor all those old timers had it figured out now. John

will bid on that job and he'll get it but I also want John's job so I am going to get that and different ones. They were all wanting to move around and it wasn't a typical deal of just moving one. So I stayed there and it took them about two months to go through all that, and I was making some good money being on that subsistence and all.

I had a pass that the deal was I could claim weekend days off there as long as I was in Taylor. But, if I came back to San Antonio or got left there I didn't get anything. But I had a pass and I gave it to the engineer and I'd get up on in the engine and ride to Austin and stay down there on my days off. Then, when I'd hire him to run back to San Antonio but I'd always be able to get out there and get on that engine and so nobody [would know] that didn't show up on that thing or I'd left.

I stayed in a fifty cents a night flop house, what's you call a flop house right on across from the railroad station. That's where the railroads come in laying over, that was a big terminal there where they changed crews at that time. And then I'd charged -- I didn't have to have any proof -- I'd just charge for the Glassmar Hotel. The cheapest room there was three dollars and fifty cents a night. So, I'd charge for that at the Glassmar Hotel. But the old superintendent there, he always knew to come to the flop house to get me. He was a good ole boy and anyway he would come over, "Hey Mac, you got this shift to pull," or something, but he'd never go to the Glassmar to look for me. And then eating, of course I was eating steak every once in a while, I ate pretty good.

I didn't go back to San Antonio, I came to Houston. I was going to ship out and I was having a hard time catching a ship. Well at that time in January or February

of 1950 we had a big freeze here and they just opened Settegast Yards. That was the Missouri Pacific. I went over there and saw the master mechanic and he called the Power Steam Room where all our records were and found out I was indeed qualified and he needed a man to go to work right away as an inspector out in the yard. So I immediately went to work there. By the yards just opening, they had ballast down but it was the big rock-

JACKSON: You mean for the track bed?

McCAIN: For the track bed -- bigger size rock and all you were doing was slipping and sliding all over the place and it was rough. Finally, I heard about the HB&T who was a switching yard terminal for all these trains that came in here, the Missouri Pacific still there did theirs out at Settegast and prior to that, well the Houston Belt and Terminal engines did the switching out there. But the Houston Belt and Terminal had South Yards which is on Wayside and they handled the Rock Island and the Santa Fe. So, I went out there and they immediately hired me. So I stayed there for a long time. In 1954 I had actually quit them. I worked there in 1952 and left in 1954 and went to work for the county. First I went into the insurance business, I was going to get rich in the insurance business.

JACKSON: What kind, life insurance?

McCain: Yea life and I was starving to death. It was hard for me to do that cold canvassing. That is what you really had to do. They'd preach on you, "Knock on twenty doors and you're going to make a sale." I didn't have the spiel for that. Anyway, I needed a job but in the meantime back in the early 1950s I'd become friends with the

constable there. He was elected in 1952, George Larkin[1], and there was a Dave Thompson[2] who was the Justice of the Peace. He fashioned his court after Judge Roy Bean and they were in a dilapidated building. The building was actually leaning to the side, it's a two story building and it was leaning over. Somebody took a photograph but they were criticized. "Why weren't you even?" He said, "We were even, that's the building that's leaning." Anyway, George Larkin was secretary and treasurer of the Eagles on Broadway. That club was a going concern out there then. So I joined the Eagles and was working closely with him and Judge Thompson, I knew him before he became a judge. He belonged to the Eagles, all of us running together. So in 1954 when they built the courthouse on 8903 La Porte Expressway, I finagled the maintenance man job there and that gave me a chance to go to the University of Houston. I'd been going, been trying to go the University of Houston but it gave a better opportunity-

JACKSON: Why was that?

McCAIN: Well it was work-

JACKSON: So you would have money for tuition and be able to go then?

McCAIN: Yes. The Building Superintendent downtown at that time was a guy named O. G. Albert[3] and they were good buddies with Commissioner Chapman[4], who was Commissioner of Precinct 1 at that time. Everything just worked out; Chapman just more or less told them to hire me. For that superintendent, I needed something to

[1] George Larkin, Harris County Constable, Precinct 2, 1953 - 1986
[2] Dave F. Thompson, Justice of the Peace, Precinct 2, 1952 - 1982
[3] O. G. Albert, Building Superintendent, 1952 - 1965
[4] W. Kyle Chapman, Harris County Commissioner, Precinct 1, 1951 - 1972

show that I knew something about waxing floors, janitorial and all that stuff. So for a work history, my history was that I cleaned up and did all that kind of work at the Eagles on Broadway. It's crazy. Anyway, "That's my boy," he talked, "yes, my boy, looks like you're qualified." It didn't matter whether he thought I was qualified or not, Chapman had said it and Chapman and Squatty Lyons[5] were good, were real close. So, even though the building was out there, it was in Chapman's precinct, Squatty Lyons was still over all the buildings in the county. That was the first courthouse annex built like that.

Anyway, I went to work out there with the Judge and Larkin. We were out in the country, there was nothing around us, we were just flat out in the sticks. It just look liked they cut that little piece of land out for the courthouse there. Of course Larkin and Judge Thompson, we were all big buddies. O. G. Albert, I got to tell you this, being the superintendent, he lived in Pecan Park which was just a short drive from the Courthouse Annex. He and his wife drank a little bit; he even drank on the job back then. I could smell it pretty strong back then. They were out driving about seven o'clock in the evening to see what was going on, I'd be there. A lot of times the judge was there, but the judge would be sitting in his office and he would be drinking. Anyway, O. G. Albert wanted to go to the building and inspect it. He and his wife wanted to inspect it and give me some ideas to what to be doing, being boss. That was a mistake, because when we went in and the Judge heard us he came out of his office and wanted to know who're these people. I told him, "He's superintendent." The Judge says, "What the hell you doing out here? We don't need

[5] E. A. "Squatty" Lyons, Harris County Commissioner, Precinct 4, 1943 - 1990

you out here, we got him and that's all we need out here." And he said, "Ain't no need you coming out here and nosing around and seeing whether he's working or not or what he's doing. He's doing a damn good job for us." O. G. Albert never fooled with me after that again. That was the kind of friends, politics and all I guess, good old friends that stood up for each other back then.

JACKSON: You were young; I mean you weren't even thirty years old.

McCAIN: No, no. Let's see, I was born in 1928, I was about twenty-two then. We just took care of our own out there. I know we had a good snow storm one time and it held everybody in, the clerks, everybody working in there, of course there weren't that many. They were out in the parking lot snowballing each other.

I remember I'd worked up to that time and got an assistant. He was a four hour a day man going to school. His mother worked in the tax office and she was a very good friend of Carl Smith[6] and Chapman's, so I got me an assistant. But was ironic -- everybody out there playing in the snow and throwing snowballs and he was just having the best time out there. So everybody started leaving early and all that stuff and we went back in the building. I says, "You go out there and burn that trash." We had an old incinerator out back. I says, "Go take the trash." "WHAT! YOU WANT ME TO GO OUT IN THIS KIND OF WEATHER FOR THAT?" I says, "Don't give me that bull, boy. You were just out there playing."

Anyway, he made me so mad one time, we had some holding cells out there, there's two cells and he'd walk around. He made me mad one time; I forget what he said to me. It was about doing something. We were right by the door and the key

[6] Carl S. Smith, Harris County Assessor and Collector of Taxes, 1947 - 1998

wasn't too far away. I got a hold of him and the desk where the key was, I pulled that drawer and got the jail door key. I put him in there and locked that door; he was just a young kid going to school. I locked that door and he was begging me to let him out. I said, "No, I ain't going to let you out." He said, "You're going to be in a lot of trouble. I am going to start screaming." I said, "Go ahead; we're so far out in the sticks who's going to hear ya?" Then he starts crying so I finally let him out. I hate it, I am just rambling on with this bull corn.

The constable, Larkin, and the Judge stayed in office for a long time. They both retired and they weren't beat but they were there for a long time. The judge's mother lived on Medina. When they had him up for appointment, the other JP had been indicted and there was something wrong, anyway, Bob Casey[7] called him and he was living back cross over close to 75th and Harrisburg, somewhere back in there, which was actually out of the precinct at that time, out of Precinct 2. They got together, got their heads together and got him moved to his mother's over night out of that other place so his residence was in the precinct. Anyway, they were both real good guys.

Judge Thompson, he loved to watch people squirm when they would be on the stand and he'd know something, he would start asking questions. One woman was trying to get one of those bonds they used to get to keep the husband from beating up on the women, keep 'em away. And they put him under a bond. So she was testifying and the Judge asked her and she said, "At no time do we ever get along, at no time have we ever got along." And the Judge looked at her and says to her, "How many

[7] Robert Randolph Casey, Harris County Judge, 1951 - 1958

children do you got?" I think she had seven or eight children. He says, "Well, you must of got along at that time."

Judge Thompson and Larkin were a mainstay out there. Larkin, Bill Lambert was a constable before Larkin, so we would have things going on down at the Eagles and somebody might call the police and the police would come out. "Oh, you can't come in, you're not a member." We wouldn't let them in.

JACKSON: What kind of things were you doing?

McCAIN: Stag parties and different things going on down there and gambling was one of them too. Anyway, because they weren't members, we couldn't let them in. In the meantime, they'd been on the phone, got Bill Lambert who showed up with some deputies and since he had a card and he was member, we let him in with his guest. So, they got in and police standing out there and when they went in there and they got through they quieted that bunch real good. They put it down. They were real good at persuading them to stop it. But where a deputy might man handle some old guy, Bill Lambert come along and pick him up and, "Oh, he wasn't supposed to do that" routine. He'd get his vote right back because he'd pat him on the back and brag about, "Oh man, he wasn't suppose to do that. I'm going to have to get on to him for that." And the guy starts liking Bill Lambert again.

This is just part of history I guess, because Bill Lambert ran against Buster Kern[8]. Buster Kern, Ug Williams[9] was his chief deputy, all of a sudden they found out that there was a bomb on Buster's car. I don't think they ever went to trial for that

[8] Clairville Vincent "Buster" Kern, Harris County Sheriff, 1948 - 1970
[9] Bryan Earl "Ug" Williams, Harris County Deputy, d. October 1963.

-- Bill went to trial for that. But he got into a lot of trouble, they pinned it on him before the election, he was trying to kill Buster.

JACKSON: Do you think he had done that?

McCAIN: There's doubt, I hate to say it but, I don't know. I've got my doubts about it. I think, personally my gut feeling is, I just feel that it was a put-up job. But, they got him good though. He left though and went to Lafayette, Louisiana, which I heard later he was doing real good down there.

Anyway, getting back to the Eagles that was there on Broadway and the gambling, it was just a close knit group that run that and George Larkin, being Secretary and Treasurer, he had complete control. So I knew better than to vote against him. Anyway, I forget what year it was the State passed a law, a bill that if you had any gambling equipment in your possession after midnight on a certain night, it was a felony to have it in your possession and you would be found. I remember being with George and just taking the slot machines and some of them we did not even have keys to them, trying to break them, bust them up and get what ever money we could that was in the machine and working his way through there. We got as much as we could and loaded them on a truck and carried them down to 61 Riesner Street. No questions asked, you could bring them down there and dump them and there was space in front there back then, like a little park I guess, but we could take them down there, and we took that stuff down there and dumped it. Then they got rid of it, but there was no penalty as long as you had it down there before midnight. We worked out there that evening getting rid of it, we waited till the last minute to do it.

The Eagles they had a lot out there. They had a pretty good political strength because governors and different ones would want to make it a point to try to make it by there for a function, like a political function; they had a lot of political functions there. We had one function there, I forget what, they had food, barbecue, but one chief of the fire department showed up. He had his driver and his driver came up and told me and the chief deputy for Larkin at the time, that the chief didn't eat, all he would eat would be steak. And at that time Joe Pappas was Chief Deputy. He gave me some money to run down to a nice restaurant on Broadway, at that time it was Aunt Bea's, and get a steak and bring it back for this chief. Anyway, I'm going down there and I hit the railroad track and lost a hubcap and I remember losing that hubcap more so than the steak. Every time I go across a railroad track out there I think of my hubcap that that old boy caused me to loose. It's funny how things happen like that.

There was one governor, Chapman had him there, and Chapman told him, "Hey I want you to meet this guy before you leave now." And he said, "I'm in a hurry and I don't have time for him." And he follows him to the doorway and all of a sudden and then Chappy says, "But he wants to give you a check for five thousand dollars." "Oh where is he?" That's what Chapman told me, and he went back over and shook his hand and man, he was real happy to see him. That's how it can change.

JACKSON: Well now, when you were working at the courthouse, weren't you also working on the railroad?

McCAIN: Yes, I was two jobbing it.

JACKSON: How long did you do that?

McCAIN: I did that up until 1974 when I was appointed Building Superintendent downtown.

JACKSON: How did you manage two jobs?

McCAIN: Well, the job out on the railroad was from eleven to seven at night and a lot of nights and the way the trains were running, my job was as an inspector was to, we'd put trains together and I would be on a caboose for hours at a time til the switch made a double over and then I'd have to do what we call an air test. That's where you have the engineers set the brakes and you make sure they are working on those last few cars, brakes a setting, and then you give them a release and high ball them, and they are ready to go. Which you had to do that to make sure that the brakes were working. It was assumed they were working on the head end if they were working on the back end. I read a lot of magazines. They did away with most of those cushion jobs like that, they fought the union for a little while and pretty well done away with all that stuff.

JACKSON: So you were also a member of the union?

McCAIN: Yes.

JACKSON: Which union was that?

McCAIN: Brotherhood of the Railway Carman.

JACKSON: When did you join? In Oregon?

McCAIN: You did it when you first went to work. That was even on the Union Pacific. I was always active in the union and held some kind of office there. That's why the railroad out here, they were after me all the time. But they'd ride a union guy like that but I got by. The superintendent offered me, was always wanting me, to take a

foreman's job and I would tell him no. Then they finally figured out that the only shifts that I wanted to work was eleven to seven at night with Fridays and Saturdays off. See I had a housekeeper that stayed with my children and I wanted her to be off on Friday and Saturday and come back Sunday night when I went to work. So that is why I really had to keep those hours and finally they said, "Tell you what, we will make you foreman on that night shift that you're working right now, eleven to seven with Fridays and Saturdays off ." Well, the foreman there, actually his name was Elkins, he had those hours but he was a little shaky and all, a flaky guy. But I looked at him and I asked him, "What are you going to do with Elkins?" And they said, "Oh, we'll fire him." I said, "If you're going to do that to him, you'd do it to me, so I don't want your job." So that's the way that turned out, but they would try, because my union activities, they were always trying to get me into a management job. I'd seen it with others on the Union Pacific. We had a great guy in the union and they made him a foreman and they dogged him, just dogged him to death, because the men didn't have a use for him anymore and the company didn't have any use for him.

JACKSON: So what kind of union issues were you dealing with at that time?

End Tape 1 Side B

Begin Tape 2 Side A

McCAIN: Most of time I was a vice local chairman, at some time I might be a local chairman. We had a tough old boy, when he was local chairman he was tough and I was like good cop and bad cop. I'd be the good guy, come in and try to smooth things off. But when we reversed it, then he would be the good guy trying to keep me

quiet. So we had a game that we worked, but they had their games too. But mainly it's to comply with the agreements.

The reason I told you about the job I'd be a working was we had a contract, nobody else could connect the air hoses between the cars. We did all that, and we did all the inspecting and we did all signaling and checking the trains and all, on mechanical and safety compliance defects. Now, you notice on the railroads you don't ever see a caboose. Back then you wouldn't think about running a train without a caboose and a compliment of conductors and brakemen there. So, they have been able to do away with that. They got what they call a pigtail coming off that rear car and they've got a flashing light and something can happen. Our contention in the union was that something can happen in the middle and quite often that guy in the keeper, in that little caboose, could see something down there and stop it. He had a mechanism on the caboose that he could start drawing down air. You charge your tanks up with air for the brakes to work, but when you release and take down some of the pressure out of that charge line, it's constantly charging, when you take it out, the tank air sets the brakes. So, he could easily draw down the air and start stopping that train and you didn't have radios and all back then, you had to do it all by signals, but they'd know something was wrong and you could stop it from back there.

Anyways some of it was, in my opinion, pretty ridiculous and sometimes we had a fight with some union guy that he was really up, "Look what they are doing to me," and I am thinking, "Oh wait a minute, that's not really that bad." I was thinking sort of I guess on the management side. We had a job, one yard that we would keep a man down there eight hours well around the clock. Eight hours and all he ever did

was to inspect some cars that came out of some of the sidings that they got together and then he was going to run them over to the South Yard. He'd go and inspect those and hook up the air hose and do the brake test on them. That would be eight hours and that was really cushion. But getting back to me having time on our unions, the union rules were we had to do that. A switchman or nobody else could do it, because if they did, we'd time slip them. Time slipping means you charge them for about four hours for doing that. My men, if they were even called at home by an official, I mean a foreman on up, they were called at home on a railroad matter like that, we charged them four hours. If they called you to come to work, it was four more or only thirty minutes or an hour, you got four hours for it. Really, I don't mind that. I can still understand that's a good policy because if you're going to call them in it's not worth it, if it's worth calling them in for, it's worth paying anybody at any company four hours for it anyway.

But mine was where they fired somebody and I would represent them. I won a lot of my cases. Frankly, the ones that I was acting as chairmen on, I only lost one. A good number of years I was able to win them, of course our cases would go and they would reject all of it, the railroad. It would go to the railroad labor board in Chicago and I won and they would reverse it. But by then, that time it would take a general chairman who was over a large area here to take it there and when they will take it there. But, I had to do all my paper work a head of time.

And one case that I lost was the man didn't take my advice. He was a car man and it was for stealing. There was a little yard down here right off Harrisburg Tunnel called Congress Avenue Yard. We had men working there around the clock and he'd

be working, he and the yardmaster and a clerk got in cahoots. The yardmaster would order a car put to a siding and then they were stealing stuff out of the car and finally they got caught. The others, they sold out, it was a joint investigation and I told my man, "We're going to go separate." He said, "No, we're in this together, me and my buddies," and he wound up getting fired and the others stayed off work for a period of time and then were put back on. He was fired for good and they really hooked him. He was staunchly in favor of the other two, "We're standing together." That's the only case I ever lost.

The railroad officials were also messing up so bad that they didn't use any common sense. And there was ways to do all that. I was one time at what we call the south end of South Yard and that was down close to Griggs Road and the north was up by Wayside. We had a shanty down there and I was down there. This one train master was trying to catch me. He just had it in for me. I didn't like him and we didn't like each other. So he had a special agent with him and they were down there and I was a sitting there, asleep, and they were watching me. All of a sudden, the phone rang and I got up to answer the phone and I looked around and saw this white shirt in the window and I said, "Hey come on in." I knew who it was; I knew he was him trying to catch me. So I answered the phone and at that time the agents had to turn in a separate report, they did not report to the train master or anybody. But the train master was telling him what kind of report to write. In other words, that I had overstayed my minutes. You worked eight hours but you got twenty minutes to eat. So this guy, when he turned in a separate report that went to the chief and right on to the big boy's office, on what went on that night. That was the special agent. Of

course that guy, the train master, was going to fire me and finally when they got to the bottom of it they said you can't do a thing about it. He was actually on his minutes because the special agent wrote in there that they did, they went with him and was outside the window, and they looked in the window and that I was sleeping and twenty minutes later after they got there the phone rang with somebody calling me off my minutes to give me an assignment and that shot them down too. I was always real lucky like that, anyway.

JACKSON: So you worked your railroad job from eleven to seven.

McCAIN: Eleven to seven. I'd get some sleep and rest in the mornings and then I'd go to the courthouse in the afternoons and work there. Frankly, everybody at the courthouse knew me and knew what I was doing and the Commissioner knew it. But if anything drastic happened during the day they would call me and I would be there in just a few minutes. In the Constable's office I always had a phone box for messages there and they would take a message for me and put it in there. If it was urgent they would give me a call and tell me. Well, later when we moved from there to Pasadena . . .

JACKSON: You mean the courthouse moved?

McCAIN: Yes, moved. The house had a little office out back and a store room and the superintendent was Gene Crumble. He was insistent that he was going to put a phone out there for me, and I says, "No, I don't want it and I don't need it." Finally he says, "I'm gonna do it, I don't care what you like." I says, "All right Mr. Crumble, you put that phone out there. And if I'm sitting right there at that desk and answer it, you're going to wonder why I'm not out doing some work, and if I don't answer and if you

need me, you can't get me. This way it's full proof. It goes to that one place, that one box and those deputies that were working right there, they knew what to do to get me." And they usually knew where I was. So anyway, he never did put the phone out there. But he said he just wanted to keep up with me. We had a lady named Wooly and she was his secretary and she would tell him, "Well I don't know what he is doing or where he's at and you never know about him. But I do know when I cal,l he calls me back in a few minutes."

I was doing my job and that helper was doing my job and he was a pretty good ole boy. I ain't gonna tell you his name because he went on to become a lawyer here. He was a mamma's boy and she ran that tax office out there on 89 off the La Porte Expressway. There were times when she would have to work late during the tax rush, the license plate rush, and back then they didn't stagger by the months like they do now. He'd (Carl Smith) have that big rush and people just lined up all over the place to get in and she'd have to stay late and we'd have to cut the line off. A lot of times, Carl Smith insisted that she bring her work into the downtown courthouse which was in the old court building, the criminal courts, on the first floor. She had to bring that in every night and she lived right out in the Heights. Sometimes it would be a little suspicious out there -- cars or people hanging around. We'd put the money in an old brown paper sack and I'd go and get into my car and she'd carry all the other stuff that looked like that it had the money in it and all and she'd carry that. I'd follow her downtown and give it to her right there on [the street] before she went in the courthouse. We did that a lot, that went on a good bit and nobody ever knew that the real money was in a paper sack and it was me. Nobody ever got wise to it, but

nobody tried to hold her up either. I don't know what the outcome would be if any body ever wanted to hold her up.

There was one old boy out there had a submachine gun. He didn't have any place to put it and he'd set it in the janitors closet and of course it wasn't loaded. Anyway, one night there was some guys out in the parking lot in cars and they were looking a little strange. We got suspicious and there was a doorway to the side where you could go right into the Constable's office and the jail office there. It was overlooking the parking lot. So I took that machine gun, walked outside there with it and boy they took off. Anyway, people, it's just hard you know the stuff that went on back then, it's just crazy.

We had Judge Thompson was doing the Medical Examiner work then. He's a coroner and he'd do it all over for some of these other JPs too. And some of them were real sick and down and he just do it for them. A lot of times, "Mac, come on ride with me," and we'd ride out. I'd ride with him and he would go to the scene. One time a man had shot himself in the head and blown his brains on the top of his bathroom and the Judge says, "Come on in here and look at this Mac." I went in there and looked, boy I couldn't and just got out. He'd just loved to pull stuff like that.

JACKSON: When he was coroner, you know the JPs did it for their own precincts, but he did it for other JPs too?

McCAIN: In Harris County.

JACKSON: Did they not like to do it?

McCAIN: No, we had a JP, I forget what his name was, he was real ill and he couldn't get out and do that. It just so happens between that JP and Precinct 2 was where they had

the majority of this stuff. The others I forget how they would have handled it or Thompson would have probably done it for all of them. He just loved doing that kind of stuff.

JACKSON: Well, one of the reasons why I'm asking is that when we are looking back in the records for inquests, if they were going to show up in his records or if they were going to show up in the precinct records for the JPs he was doing it for.

McCAIN: In that case I would say they would show up in the JP . . .

JACKSON: That he did it for. We need to probably to check some of the records and see if we can see him showing up in other precincts.

McCAIN: Or they might have occasionally done some. So I am not saying that he did it all when they were in a bad way he'd take care of them. I can't remember the name of those two other judges that were in bad health at that time.

JACKSON: How long was Thompson JP out there?

McCAIN: Let's see? He went in 1952 and he was there until about, he was there until about 1985, I think?

JACKSON: So he continued doing that even after there was a Medical Examiner?

McCAIN: No! No! That's what shut it down.

JACKSON: He stopped with the Medical Examiner.

McCAIN: Because of the work load and the way the autopsies came about, it was rough-shod, like some of the problems you have now with DNA and the police. They couldn't stand the heat and they went out for a medical degree for the Medical

Examiner's job, and Jachimczyk[10], Joe Jachimczyk was the first one, the very first one, he took over all that.

JACKSON: If I can sum up, you got into Houston because you were looking for a ship and ended up working on the railroads and because of your activities with the Eagles you ended up with the job at the courthouse.

McCAIN: Yes, that and politics.

JACKSON: Right, well politicking.

McCAIN: Let me tell you something about Judge Thompson. If he didn't have an opponent, even in the years he didn't have an opponent, he was highly emotional and just nervous and because back then you could also have a write-in opponent. So we dreamed up this, we liked to get to him, Larkin and all of us. He was always first one to vote over on Broadway, there close to Lawndale, Harris Elementary School. He'd bragged about that all the time. So we slipped out there and put up some signs, got somebody that he wouldn't recognize, and put up some signs on write-in votes against Judge Thompson. We had those signs all over and parked away and was watching him. Then a guy was handing out literature telling them how to do a write-in vote against Judge Thompson. God, he blew, "My God Almighty!" Anyway, first time he could get a phone he was calling Larkin, "God damn, y'all gotta help me, this ole boy, they're mounting a write-in campaign against me." And it was just at that one school. But we scared the devil out of him on that. Anyway, and you only ran for two years back then. It was paper ballots at that. That write-in campaign scared him.

[10] Joseph A. Jachimczyk, M. D., Harris County Medical Examiner, 1960 – 1995.

JACKSON: Well, I think that we are finished for today and thank you that was great.

McCAIN: Okay.

JACKSON: This is a continuation of the interview with Mac McCain being held in Houston, Texas. The date is May 12, 2005. When we stopped the previous interview, we had discussed when you came to Houston, how you found work with the railroad, and then you held a concurrent job with Harris County as a custodian of courthouse Annex 1. What we're interested in today is how you became the head of Building Services for the county and what that job entailed and what it was like. So, I guess what I want to know is how did you move from being a custodian of a courthouse to the head of a major county department?

McCAIN: As a matter of fact, being a head of a major county department, we only had the Civil Courts Building and we were leasing the Southwest Drug Building. We had, I don't think we had, no we didn't have the fire station. We had the Family Law Center, so it wasn't that gigantic of job until I came in 1974 and it wasn't because of me coming in 1974. The events were changing to where they had to expand the buildings. They had more and more annex courts and then enlarged the courts and that was what happened. The job is a major job now, but I did nearly every building that went in except the last two, the Criminal Justice Center and the Civil Justice Center. I was in on the planning stage but I'd retired and didn't get in on the end of it. But nearly all the other buildings and annexes came in under years I was Building Superintendent.

I'll back up. I'm sorry that I'm getting ahead of myself. So I'll back up on the appointment. I'd been involved in politics, everyone knew I'm out at Pasadena,

La Porte, basically I had Pasadena, La Porte and, there was a building down in Clear Lake. Squatty Lyons, being in charge of buildings, was the one that was going to make the recommendation. But about in the 1972 election, the Commissioner's Court changed. Judge Elliot[11] was there and then Jamie Bray[12] came in and then later, a couple of years later, Tom Bass[13] came in. Tom Bass beat my good friend Kyle Chapman. Basically then it gave the County Judge, Elliot, who was ruling the county with pretty much of an iron fist, and gave him the authority. He took the buildings, they took them away from Squatty, and appointed a man named Egg Miller into that job. Egg was a very nice guy, but I don't blame him he got appointed to the job, had it for two years. And then politics changed and Commissioner Fonteno[14] was elected and Judge Lindsay[15] was elected, so that changed the vote on the court back in favor, I might say, to our side. And just shortly after that, Squatty made the appointment of me to head the buildings . . .

JACKSON: So, if I could interrupt for a minute. So, what happened was Judge Elliot was in charge of the buildings and it was taken away from Commissioner Lyons?

McCAIN: That's right.

JACKSON: When the court changed then the court decided to give the buildings back to Squatty?

McCAIN: Yes.

[11] William M. "Bill" Elliott, Harris County Judge, 1959 - 1973
[12] Jamie Bray, Harris County Commissioner, Precinct 2, 1971 - 1974
[13] Tom Bass, Harris County Commissioner, Precinct 1, 1973 - 1984
[14] Jim Fonteno, Harris County Commissioner, Precinct 2, 1975 - 2002
[15] Jon Lindsay, Harris County Judge, 1974 - 1994

JACKSON: Then at that point, he put his own person in charge? And these buildings were which buildings for the county?

McCAIN: Your courthouses and annexes and whatever was there at the time.

JACKSON: Okay. Did it include, for example, the libraries?

McCAIN: No, because the libraries were separate except we were suppose to lend service to them where we could.

JACSKON: Okay.

McCAIN: It was a pat on the back and a gentlemen's agreement that we would have to do those things. It was quite often, I would get calls from Commissioner Lyons telling me, "Hey they need help, go help them." So that was it. And at one time with Commissioner Lyons, if he said something even on changing some of these buildings that were being built before the inspectors were under the County Engineer, he'd make change orders right there because he knew he had the votes on the court. He didn't have to wait on all that stuff and you didn't have the court agendas back then like you do now. If you wanted something to go to court with Judge Elliot, you would sometimes put it in a box, he'd look at it and if he didn't want to talk about it that day he'd throw it away. Things like that went on. But, all the Commissioners would just bring up what they wanted to that day and that happened all the time.

In 1972 before the change, Mr. Gene Cromwell was the Building Superintendent prior to that and he retired and it was pretty well slated that I would become Building Superintendent. But then politics, Tom Bass beat Commissioner Chapman and then the vote changed on the court and they put Egg Miller in there. Egg Miller, I forget, he went by Egg for all these years and I can't for the life of me

remember his first name. But I remember his looks and all and he was a very nice guy. Anyway, then when I came down and took over, there was a secretary in the office and one girl, one additional girl working there. We were in a small office on the fourth floor of the Criminal Courts Building. The lady had been there so long, when Mr. Crommell was Superintendent then when Egg Miller was there, she told them what to do and they just didn't have to do anything. She had a file system that was in her head.

Anyway, I had been watching things and knew certain things had to be changed. The first day I walked into that office, I was in there, and she came in and shut the door and told me that I didn't have to do any work at all. She'd take care of everything and take care of me. And I said, "No ma'am, I don't do business quite that way. Now things are changing. I'm going to be in charge and I'll appreciate any help you can give me." But also in that two year period when Mr. Miller was superintendent, everybody was thinking Squatty's goal was going to be like that. They didn't realize politics of one person coming into office was going to change things and she had talked, she was over seventy years old at that time, and she had talked about some the members of the court and talked down to them and their wives and all that. She was Miss Big Dog. So frankly, my bosses, the commissioners that put me in, had said, "You can let anybody go and you don't have to keep anybody at all. You can fire anybody you want to." So I gave her a chance to resign or be fired. At first she said, "I don't want to be fired, I've never been fired off of a job, you know." I said, "Well, won't you take some time, think it over, take a few days off and lets think it over now." I said, "You'll get some severance pay and certain

benefits for just retiring. I can't see you ever looking for another job at your age and needing a recommendation." She took her few days and she came back in and she said, "Mac, I've been thinking over what you said and I think I'll just go to the retirement route and get the benefits." Severance, vacation, I think that you got vacation time, and I don't know if they got sick time on top of that or not, that they hadn't used. I do know that sometimes they had overtime and if you had overtime back then, the court would pay you half of that in money. If you could take the number of hours off ahead of time, that was fine too, but also if you waited then you would get half of that amount of money. So she took it and did it that way.

And Mr. Miller, frankly I'd been told, "We are not mad at him either. We just don't want him running the buildings and you can hire him if you want to." But, I didn't know how I could really hire him and take control. Back then, of course, there was a bunch of good old buddies and Carl Smith was one of them and usually in cases like that we'd talk to Carl and he'd get a position for them and put them on so they could get at their retirement. So Mr. Miller worked for Carl Smith in the tax office until he got his retirement in. It was not that vicious unless sometimes the person, it depended on the person that you were getting rid of and how vicious they had been their selves at the time they were making these little enemies. A lot of times this lady she would just pop off and not know that one of them was within range, but she was just walking around like she was big dog.

I took over, from then it started changing. I just had different management types than what any of the others had had. My nature was I was inclined to see what needed to be done and start working on it. Some of the others prior to me, they were

all considered head janitors. Even when I got the job and until it took me a few years to break that thought, break it down, it was like I was a head janitor.

JACKSON: Well let me stop you just a minute here. When you took the job at that time, in 1974, what were your duties?

McCAIN: I was in charge of all the buildings that we had at that time which was Criminal Courts, Civil Courts, Family Law Center, the Southwest Drug Building; I don't think we had any other buildings; we got the fire station later. But that was all that was down here.

JACKSON: And what were you supposed to be doing with the buildings?

McCAIN: Managing the buildings, the upkeep and maintenance of the buildings.

JACKSON: Were you in charge of all the annexes?

McCAIN: Yes, all the annexes. As a matter of fact, this is interesting that all the annexes that came in were still under Commissioner Lyons even though they were under another commissioner's precinct. He was still over them and he was over them by the fact that at one time his precinct, the Civil Courts Building was in Precinct 4 and he was the commissioner. So when they just said, "Well, you're in charge of the building." And that just kept progressing there on all the buildings. Later, I was having a hard time with some commissioners out in the precincts wanting me to do something and I'd tell them I had to ask Commissioner Lyons first. I couldn't get it on the agenda. I think that we were starting to use agenda system then or trying to put it into effect. And he would tell me, "No, if he wants it, let him come ask me." Well, that put me in a bad spot trying to go back and diplomatically tell them that I couldn't just do it that -- Commissioner Lyons. Well, they went along, but it took

them a long time. They knew that I was walking a tight rope between them and Commissioner Lyons.

So later, they took the buildings away from Commissioner Lyons and the downtown buildings were under the commissioner in that precinct which had become Precinct 1 and what ever else was in Precinct 1. The other commissioners were in charge of their buildings and I worked for them on their buildings.

JACKSON: In their precincts?

McCAIN: Yes, and it still wasn't necessarily me working for them, I was just flat in charge of the buildings in their, in all, the precincts but each commissioner had the say over it. So it shot Commissioner Lyons down on that. It really hurt him because he was so proud of being in charge for so many years but he started accepting it pretty good. As a matter of fact, when they were doing that and the rumbling was going on, the thought was they were doing it to fire me too. Carl Smith, again, had a slot for me to come to. Commissioner Bass called me in and he was over in Precinct 1 then and that gave him the majority of the bigger buildings downtown. So, the bigger weight on the buildings was coming from him and he says, "Mac we don't have a problem with you, we like you. We want you to continue with what you are doing. We just wanted the buildings. It'll make your job easier too; we don't have a problem with you." Judge Lindsay also told me the same thing, similar to that. I told each one of them, I have professed to be Commissioner Lyons's friend all these years and he is a friend of mine, so I won't discontinue going down and visiting him, and they said, "We don't expect you to, we want you to do that." So consequently after that I would

make it a point to go by a little more often then I used to and have coffee with him after lunch and we'd shoot the bull and stuff like that, so it made it a lot easier.

JACKSON: Took the pressure off you to some extent. Basically, what you were doing with the buildings, you were providing the janitorial service, if something broke you made sure it got fixed.

McCAIN: Air conditioning, everything.

JACKSON: Okay. When you started, you said the office was comprised of you, you had a secretary, and I assume you hired another secretary.

McCAIN: Yes, we had to hire one more. I had two people for a good while in that office. I had three and then later we were getting larger and this Administration Building was being built and opened about that time just a little after that. I got a hold of plans and it showed that the plans for my office were to be in County Clerk's office on the ninth floor for the Court Clerk and I thought, man that's not going to work and that office was supposed to be on the sixth floor. And I went to work politically, got that one changed because I could see those commissioners walking by my office everyday and every time they walked by they think of something they wanted to tell me. But when I got down to the sixth floor, it wasn't but on rare occasions that one would take the time to get off the elevator and come talk to me. So I didn't have to go and put up with all that. I knew that the heat would be on with them just walking by.

JACKSON: You had the office but then you obviously were hiring and firing people in the field to do the work for you.

McCAIN: Yes.

JACKSON: Yes, did you then have a system of managers? How was the department set as far as the authority and the lines of responsibility?

McCAIN: At that time we were in charge of communications and the phone system was all that it was. That was under the Buildings Superintendent and I had someone that ran that. And there was a woman named Miss Nagle that ruled the telephone operators with an iron fist. That was the old plug-in days where you pull them out and plugged them in. Any of the ladies with long hair that went there to apply for a job she'd say, "You'd get it provided you cut that hair." The deal was that she didn't want the operators getting those cords tangled up in the hair. They'd have to cut their hair and have short, shorter hair so that it didn't bother them. Then we had a chief engineer who was a real strong person. He was real sharp and his name was Bob Richardson and as a matter of fact he was the first one that started some engineer's schools. A lot of his employees would more or less get their training under him and go off and go to work for a lot more money in another building.

JACKSON: For a private enterprise?

McCAIN: Yes. In later years though, when they woke up to the fact that while they were making better money the benefits weren't as good, we'd have those same ones come recycle. But he said he liked it like that, he liked them to get out and learn what it is all about and every one of them would learn different ways of handling their jobs. So, he liked it like that.

I had a chief electrician his name was Clarence.

End of Tape 2 Side A

Begin Tape 2 Side B

McCAIN: Clarence, really, he did not like that name. He wanted C.E. Rainey. So anyway, him and Miss Nagel would go round and round about what she needed. A lot of times it was up to him to help get some of her phone lines in where she needed them and different things and they just fussed all the time. He called her Simon Legree. She was real good for that and then later we changed over to the new system and got rid of all the plugs, we didn't get rid of operators though.

I was in charge of all the elevator operators and every building had elevator operators in them then except the Administration Building now. Squatty, Commissioner Lyons, was always one to want to keep employees on. The more people you had the better. He didn't want to contract any of that stuff out and he didn't want to modernize it and we would go round and round. I'd have to satisfy the other members of the court, bring up the elevators in the Criminal and Civil Building because they all had operators and back then employees, quite often on their off-time, would work in campaigns. It was really the thing to do.

JACKSON: Was that expected?

McCAIN: No, they were never told to do it, but you sort of had a feeling that it would be good if you did. Anyway, those operators were real good talkers and would get out there and push cards for different politicians at election time. At different years, I would put in for modernizing the elevators to eliminate the operators and it was going to cost a pretty good bit of money to do that, up in the millions. The payback on the salary was going to more then take care of it, pretty quick pay back time. And I never will forget we had an elevator operator, Sarah, I can't remember her last name. She was a little short chubby blond and she had a little mouth anyway. But Commissioner

Eckels[16] had just been elected and he got on her elevator and he went over there and told her to express him to a floor -- with that particular elevator you couldn't express. We had one freight elevator and one that carried freight and prisoners in that building that she could go [directly], but this one she just couldn't lock and express him personally to that floor. But also, I had orders out you don't express anybody. I don't care if it's a judge because if there's a citizen walking on there at the same time that judge is there and you keep them off and express that judge, that's wrong. So, we just didn't do it, didn't allow it. And she told him she couldn't and he was arguing with her and she didn't realize he was commissioner. She says, "Well you can go to Hell." So then later on, the interesting part about that is that when we were talking about modernizing the elevators and getting rid of the operators and Commissioner Lyons, he was always arguing in favor of it and why we needed them, and this was at budget time and he says, "And they can tell you where to go too." And then Commissioner Eckels looked over at me and said, "They sure can, can't they Mac?" I said, "Yes, sir."

JACKSON: Well what happened to Sarah? Anything?

MCCAIN: Nothing real bad happened to any of them, they all got their retirement and all.

JACKSON: But when she told the commissioner to go to Hell?

McCAIN: Nothing happened. She got out of that, she didn't know who he was. Sarah used to come into my office crying a lot and I had a box of Kleenex and I told her, "Sarah, the only time I ever get a new box of Kleenex is when you've used this one up." She started crying. The ladies, they were all real nice. What would happen sometimes is

[16] Robert Y. Eckels, Harris County Commissioner, Precinct 3, 1973 - 1988

that when you had a real cute, good looking one, some department heads or different ones would wind up dating them. And you would have an argument with some company. I remember one time this guy was a millionaire, he was well off and that was back in those days and he started dating this one cute redhead, not knowing that somebody else was dating her. The argument started between them and anyway, I don't know if we need to go into all…

JACKSON: So what happened, they just argued or?

McCain: They argued, but also this guy was in charge of buying, purchasing for the county. This guy had a big company and we were particularly interested in buying from him and all of a sudden everything was all right until that happened and his products became no good. So, I finally cornered this purchasing agent and I told him, I says, "I really don't understand what a piece of tail has to do with the quality of [unintelligible]."

But those were interesting times and I know a Building Superintendent prior to Mr. Cromwell went to Commissioner Lyons and told him about the same guy going on a lunch hour around here somewhere, having nooners with an operator and Squatty said, "Well, it was on their lunch hour wasn't it?" He said, "Well, yeah." "Then what the hell are you sticking your nose in their business for?" Some of us didn't like him, the other guy, too well. He says, "Matter of fact, makes me think a little more of him now that he has guts to do that." It was hilarious at times. Anyway, that takes care of the operators and but it just gradually grew more and more. When we moved into this building, to the Administration Building on the sixth floor, I had a pretty good operation set up by then and had more help.

JACKSON: How many administrative staff did you have at that time?

McCAIN: Myself, I had an assistant and, as a matter of fact I had two assistants, and still had the chief engineer and chief operator for the phones and had payroll clerks in there, let's see and about two or three clerks in there.

JACKSON: You said at one time you were also in charge of furnishings? Was that right from the beginning or was that job added later?

McCAIN: That would evolve from time to time because the purchasing agent was appointed by the judges. And a lot of times he would really bend over backwards to get them some of this elaborate stuff just to keep them pleased. Which I don't blame him, but the court would get mad and put furnishings, every time somebody wanted some furniture, they'd have to have an okay and I'd have to check it out. If it went to court, it was referred to me and I was supposed to check it out and say yes or no whether they got it or not.

JACKSON: These were the district judges?

McCAIN: Any of them.

JACKSON: Any body wanting anything?

McCAIN: Yes. That would go on for a while, then all of a sudden a week and a little bit til some body got mad again and they would throw something else under me. Just like parking. I had been Building Superintendent and I arranged for parking on a lesser scale what is now. Every parking spot had to be approved by me and I think it is still like that under Mr. Yancey[17]. But parking and the judges moved in their court rooms by seniority. I'll back up and explain the seniority among the judges. They might be

[17] Michael Yancey, Director, Facilities and Property Management, 1998 - present

elected to a certain court number but the court that they would be going to might be one of the lesser, wouldn't be too nice because a judge prior to that, when it became vacant had moved to another court where a judge had left. So they played musical chairs all the time and that was a big expense moving them. Each judge's office had different plugs that they wanted and walls and different things that they wanted and different phone systems and all or different phones and stuff like that and really it was too costly. But I had to arrange that seniority system, so every time it would come up I would have to go through the seniority system and the next judge would have a choice of whatever court was vacant at that time.

Same way with parking. Parking was choice spots and some of it was lesser so therefore it went by the seniority system too. And those judges would worry you more about parking then they would about court rooms sometimes. They both bothered them and that went on for a long time. Whereas now you have uniformed court rooms, that was what I was wanting for years -- to get the uniformed court rooms to where you were in a Court Number 210 and it's stamped on right there and you run for 210 you're going in 210 so you know what you are running for and that's what you're going to get. But the seniority system is supposed to be stopped now. We move them around and also that's going to come in handy with the new opening of the new Civil Courts Building.

I remember one time there was a District Judge, Jack Smith[18], and we had a building over at Citizens Bank Building across the corner here and we had Court of Appeals. They expanded the Court of Appeals by I think it was six justices, no three

[18] Jackson B. Smith, Justice, First Court of Appeals, 1980 – 1988.

justices on each court. We had two courts of appeal, the 14th and the 1st. We didn't have office space over in the Civil Building for them, they wanted expansion, still, had the court over there and offices for some of them. Jack Smith left a very nice court room over in the Civil Courts Building to run for the Appeals Court. I had him on the ninth floor of that old bank building, leaky roof, there was a lot of things wrong with that bank building. It was always a mess, but that's the only place we had to office him. One day I happen to be over there and he hollered, "McCain, come in here!" He said, "You know how I am an Appellate Court Judge and you expect me to be officed in a place like this. Look, just look to where I'm having to sit." I said, "Judge did you come and look at this before you ran for the job?" He said, "No! I figured it would be nice." But anyway I said, "If that's bothering you, you should of come and looked at where you were going to have to office before you run for that job."

Then another time we were at a function and he was popping off about it and Bill Cannon[19] was over in the Probate Courts and Jack Smith, Judge Jack Smith, and finally he was hollering about how he spent fifty thousand dollars to get that job over there with no decent court room and office and Bill Cannon told him, "Jack, I'll tell you what, I'll give you fifty thousand dollars if you swap places with me." He'd given away a bigger salary than what they had over there and Jack would have had a nice court room.

[19] Bill Cannon, Assistant to Probate Judge; Justice, 14th Court of Appeals, 1982 – 1994.

Anyway, we had one County Court Judge, Charlie Coussons[20], that had a hang-up, a lot of them had a hang-up on bookshelves, just more books on their walls, oh all these books. I'd go in sometimes, they'd be hollering about bookshelves and I'd put my hand on a shelf and I'd say, "You haven't moved these books in a long time and you better learn how to read."

Walter Rankin[21] had a big annual barbecue party at Atascosita and I'd gotten out of my car and I was walking toward the entry, there was a big tent outside, and Charlie Coussons and his wife, Irene, were way on the other side. Charlie just took off running to me and he says, "When you going build those bookshelves for me?" And we'd already built a lot for him and he wanted more. He was just arguing about that and Irene, she was a real nice lady, they were both nice, but she was real nice, she just got a kick out somebody getting to Charlie though. And I says, "Well Judge, now look around you. Now you see, you are a Judge, an important person, and all these people showing up here really don't know who I am, but they know you. This is adding prestige to me that you ran across here just to stop me. They're thinking I'm important. Therefore, I'm never going to build those things." I had to put him in a court over in the old bank building, he didn't have any jury trials there, just hearings and all. He loved it, he didn't want to leave there. He was well satisfied there at that time. His wife Irene was an attorney too. The only thing of it is that he could look out his window and see her sitting at her office in the State Building right next to him there. I always told him that we did that just so Irene could keep looking in on him.

[20] Charles "Charlie" Coussons, Judge, County Civil Court at Law #4, 1977 – 1994.
[21] Walter H. Rankin, Harris County Constable, Precinct 1, 1965 - 1991

Then, let me see, I'm just rambling off and on. Do you have a subject you want me to get back to?

JACKSON: Well, you brought up something just when you said you were able to build the bookcases. How busy was the carpenter shop and how much work did the carpenter shop do?

McCAIN: The Carpenter shop did a lot of work. At one time it was on what we call the first floor of the Civil Courts Building, when you go back to leaving the Civil Courts Building going through the tunnel to the Criminal Courts Building. Going through the Civil Courts there is a door that goes back to a machinery room and that was the carpenter shop back there. But they made a lot of stuff back there, but the only way we can get in and out there, take deliveries for lumber or anything, was to pull up in that drive way and come through one of the windows there. Then later, when we got the old fire station, I got to move it to the fire station and then later on we were with Commissioner Bass. He had his Parks Department. The Parks Department took over downtown. I had the grounds back then too. I had somebody cutting the grass and doing a little bit of stuff like that and had a little money in that account. But for some reason Nancy Gehman, who was top superintendent for Commissioner Bass at the time, wanted it all to look better and she was complaining and I says, "Well you know that's Precinct 1. You have all the parks. Why don't you all just consider this a park?" And she says, "We will, we'll take your employees too." I think I had two, and I says, "That's good." "And we're going to get that budget too." And I says, "That's good." But I already spent it down to what was less then a thousand dollars. Anyway, she took over and they're the ones in charge of most of the stuff [potted

plants, greenery] that we put in the office on the ninth floor. We always held off on putting that stuff on the other floors because the department head or some elected official would get carried away and have some little young clerk, good looking chick, and tell them what to do and they listened and that went on too. Anyway, that brings me to another story.

I had my workers up on a floor one time in the Criminal Courts Building doing some work. We had a schedule and the girls up there they had the judge snowed, they were real friends. So anyway, they just kept wanting to change it and we didn't make changes. We had basic colors. We did what Mac said we were going to put in there, that's all. And I couldn't play favorites, paint one wall red and one green and I didn't do all that stuff. So, finally they were on him on the crew so bad and the judge came out there and told them, "You better do what they tell you or else." When they told me that I said, "Y'all just pick everything up and go back to the shop. Just take it all back to the shop. Just get all your material everything up, just pick it up." They left the job. It was right in the middle of it. They left that job and a couple of weeks later he called me and I said, "No Judge, there's too much bossing going on there. My men didn't know which way to go and which way to jump when somebody from you staff was hollering." And so finally about a week later he comes, "Mr. McCain if you'll come back and finish that, it looks awful right now. You just come back and finish and nobody is going to say anything to your people." I guess me with my relations with Commissioners Court and the commissioners I always thought, I knew, I had good footing with them. You couldn't

listen to judges on what they wanted -- they'd break the county. I'd tell the judge, one time. . .

JACKSON: Because the county had to, I just want to make this straight, the county paid for whatever the judges wanted -- it was coming out of the court. This was not under the judge's own budget.

McCAIN: I always maintained that the departments and all the judges should have their own budget to whatever paint job they wanted or anything that they wanted. I think Mr. Yancey is working toward that to get Raycraft[22] toward that charge back. I was doing a lot of the fighting back then but you don't make those changes over night.

There was an interesting story about a Judge Jack Treadway[23]. I was on the fourth floor of the Criminal Building and he was on the fourth and his court was right down from me. When we'd have a broken water line or even a sewer line in that building it was everybody, my people went on alert and everybody grabbed the elevators, mop buckets, wet backs, anything you could and would get up there and start taking care of it as fast as you could cause it took a lot of time sometimes to find the right valve to shut off down below. My orders were that you don't take anybody, I don't care who they are. Jack Treadway had been out standing by the elevator for awhile and finally he came in my office, which was right by the elevator and said, "McCain, are going to let a damn janitor and mop bucket preempt a judge?" And I said, "You're damn right." And later Commissioner Lyons and I ran into him and he

[22] Dick Raycraft, Harris County Commissioners Court Coordinator, Budget Officer, 1975 - present
[23] Jack Treadway, Harris County Justice of the Peace, 1963 – 1970; Judge, County Court at Law #4, 1970 - 1985

was telling Squatty what I had done to him and he said, "Well hell no, you should have walked your fat butt."

Jack Treadway and I we argued all the time. We were good buddies and all, it just was funny that some of the judges and some of the people that I had the very worst run-ins with would wind up being some of my very best friends and supporters, it was just amazing. I had one judge jump me one time over in the parking lot -- it was something this women wanted working for him. Then again I told him, "Now wait a minute, just because she's got priorities with you doesn't mean she's got priorities with me." He wanted to fight over it and it took another judge to get us a part. Later on he became a very good friend of mine. I don't know where to go from there?

JACKSON: Did you have the same kinds of problems with the appointed and the elected officials of the county as far as having to service them in their offices? For example, Carl Smith, I imagine he had to have taken up a lot of space with the tax office. Did you have same kind of problems with Carl that you had with the judges?

McCAIN: No, but I tell you what with the political clique Carl was in, with all of us, he usually got what he wanted. And I know when we moved into the Administration Building, just because it is the nature of the animal, all the furniture was charged to me, about three and a half million dollars worth, on my inventory and the minute they took over on the first floor, Carl started changing everything out. He didn't like what went in there at all and he fussed about it ahead of time. He started changing out. We helped him some and got back what he wanted. He had us getting some old metal desks painted. There was a system for an electro-magnetic paint of some sort where

you can come in the office and paint them right there and it attaches with the leads on it and all. But anyway, he usually got what he wanted. But on the furniture, a lot of it was his stuff. He just took it out of here and sent it to a warehouse. And later on, as a matter of fact, I think I see some of that same type of furniture showing up in inventory every once in awhile, others used it and anyway, sometimes he would reuse it in his organization.

We hired this fellow from… I guess he'd gone to inventory, I forget how we got him. But he was good at going around and getting everybody and taking it bit by bit and getting it rolled off my inventory. It took about three or four years of doing that just to get all that and in some other buildings too. It was automatically paid for out of my account, it was automatically charged to me and then I had no jurisdiction over the use of it once you got to them or writing it off or what. But we finally got it cleared up. But it was looking real bad at one time about everything else was charged to me, we couldn't even find.

JACKSON: Well, so at that time each department was in charge of their own inventory or?

McCAIN: They were supposed to be in charge of their own inventory. It was one of those things nobody wanted to do the work or who cared about and it was rocking along being charged to Mac. Who cares? But it cared to me because it could look bad for me having that much inventory lost.

JACKSON: And not knowing where it was or having control over it. I understand that definitely.

McCAIN: There's another interesting thing I just thought of about the judges. At one time the County would pay for a judge's robe, but of course you didn't have that many

judges back then. They would pay for the robes and they'd go down and be fitted out and tailor made and all, special. Man some of them looked like, oh somebody from the court in England, boy they were just so elaborate. That was a little expensive and they was wanting them cleaned about every month, the cleaning bill was pretty high. So, finally I got around to manipulating and talking about all that and they started checking it. Finally, they told the judges, "You buy your own gowns and that is the way it is." I think it is still like that now, the court doesn't furnish them. Of course they got carried away and it's too expensive and also, those more expensive gowns, the way they are designed, cost more to clean. I don't think we pay for that, we got out of paying for the cleaning bill on their robes. But see that's a perk they had many years ago, we just had four, five or six judges, we didn't have that many. But with the ones you have now you couldn't put up with that.

I've had judges now in the recent years tell me, "Oh, McCain just do this for me, just this one little thing, oh I'll be so happy." I said, "But you know, I don't have enough money." He says, "It only costs about a thousand dollars." I said, "But if I do that for you, we've got a hundred and ten judges out here. It's going to cost one hundred and ten thousand dollars. Cause when I do that for you, they're going to see it and want it." "Oh I won't tell them. Nobody will ever know." I said, "Judge, the day we start to do that, they'll all know it." With me, I knew that rumor mill would be flying and I never tried to fall in that trap.

And also, if this secret is just between me and you, I said, "Well, don't you tell me anything because I can assure you if you don't tell me, it's already out to the others. So I don't want to be a party of one that might let it out." That's one thing

that burned me up, that ole secret stuff. And I used to have a pretty good system where people, even my employees, and people coming in dealing with me, they'd use this mythical 'they' so I'd stop everything and say, "Who is 'they'?" "Well, uh, uh, you know, 'THEM'." "Well, then who is 'them'?" I'd go through all that and finally I just lick 'em. They'd say, "I can't tell you." "Well, if you can't tell me, it ain't worth listening to."

JACKSON: When you started, there were a few buildings downtown. Obviously the county now has quite a few buildings downtown. When did the county start acquiring buildings? Were we leasing and then started buying? And why were we doing this? Why did we suddenly start getting all these buildings?

McCAIN: The buildings downtown was a gradual build up of meeting a need. Now, in 1974 or 1976, the Administration Building came on line. Just prior to that, we'd opened up an annex in Baytown. It was a place of necessity where they had to have. At one time, they just had four justices of the peace. Actually they had five, there were two justices of the peace in Precinct 1 and one in each of the others. Finally they got to where I think we've got sixteen justices of the peace now and every one of them wants the same. But sometimes I would rent space. They'd want the job so bad they'd take it, but I'd have to rent space sometime just where we could get it. And in Bellaire, we rented a building at one time that if you walked in there and you dropped anything at the other end, it rolled right on down to the other end. It was embarrassing, but I just couldn't get the money to do anything. Finally, we built the building at Chimney Rock. And, at Chimney Rock we first put pre-fabricated buildings or trailers out there and operated out of those for awhile til finally we had to

build the big building we have out there. Somewhere along the line we put in a commissioner. Eckels had the property that was his park property right next to that building and he put in a heliport. Have I ever told you that one?

JACKSON: No

McCAIN: Anyway, I asked him, "Are you going to give me a key to that? He had a gate that locked. Are you going to give me a key to that?" "No, hell no, you don't need it." I said, "Okay." So later on, his assistant, Mary Frances, called me on the phone, she said, "Mac, you won't believe it. Bob has landed out there at the heliport at Chimney Rock and he can't get out that gate and nobody got a key. He wants you to send somebody out." I said, "I'm sorry, but he definitely said I couldn't have a key." And she just died laughing and called him back. And later, the next time I saw him he handed me a key to that gate out there. And I said, "Well, we'll just leave it in the justice of the peace office out there." Most of it could be fun, though.

JACKSON: When did the county get the old Cotton Exchange Building?

McCAIN: The old Cotton Exchange? That was about twenty years ago. RTC (Resolution Trust Corporation) had taken it over as a failure, they had to sell it. And I found out they wanted offers. I was out of the system, I took a hold of it a little bit out of the system because we really needed the space. So I didn't have to go through Raycraft, doing fifteen thousand analyses of it, so anyway, I knew I had the vote on the court. I put a letter to the court that I be allowed to bid on it, make an offer. It was a ridiculously low bid. I put in there provided it could be furnished to us and environmentally safe. That little stipulation in there, they took it – took our money – and closed. That ole boy was in Los Angeles, he called me and he says, "What does

this mean in here?" I says, "Well, I don't want the asbestos in there, I don't want anything in there." And they had to go in and tear all the floor tile out of the building, and get rid of all the asbestos. There are a few places where it was behind some marble and it would have done too much damage to try to get rid of it. But they went in there and did that because they were so far along with getting rid of it, and I brought attention to that. They didn't make too much off that building. They were a little perturbed.

JACKSON: What was the bid?

McCAIN: I forget. I think it was, I want to say, $350,000, I don't really remember. It was lower and now we've converted it. Between us, Mr. Yancey, we're going to get rid of it one of these days, but I can assure you in my tenure here, I've seen that every time I felt we were getting ahead, they get rid of something. We had to keep it to use it. I don't think he is going to be able to get rid of it that fast. But, that's just me. Because I do like the plan with the plaza and court system where it is. I can say, I'll bet you after occupying everything, within eight to ten years, we're going to be want to buy that back, if we get rid of it. Some of it we really need to get rid of it because of dilapidated conditions, but it's been in decent condition.

JACKSON: What about the Hogan-Allnoch Building? Why did we get it?

McCAIN: I needed it. There was parking right next to it. My plans then, we bought the vacant parking lot next to the Cotton Exchange Building, the same guy, I forgot his name, on both of those, I was able to get them, I mean the Hogan-Allnoch and the parking lot. At first, the plans were to have it demolished. My reasoning for demolishing it was it had those big timbers, huge timbers in there and I said they were

a fire hazard. I checked with the fire department and they said, "Mac, those big timbers have been treated. Steel and concrete will dilapidate faster then those timbers will, even in a fire." You get a big fire, your steel just twists and turns. Then I had a plan to take the first floor and put undercover parking areas, plans for circling in and out and parking cars there. And then it became necessary for records storage. We just turned it into that. The first floor, I guess we started using it for early or absentee voting back then. Hogan-Allnoch was furnishing supplies, like wool and thread and cloth.

JACKSON: We have about 90 cubic feet of records that Paul[24] found in that building and we still have those with the county.

McCAIN: That's good.

End Tape 2 Side B

Begin Tape 3 Side A

JACKSON: Mac, what were the records storage conditions like in 1974 when you took over as Building Superintendent?

McCAIN: It was real poor. Mostly, the County Clerk and the District Clerk and Carl Smith, the Tax Office, had records storage. At that time the tax office had first floor at 101 Crawford. They stored records down there and we stored furniture up there, we even had Mosquito Control in there at one time. The County Clerk was running out of space for some of the records they had and the District Clerk too, but quite often we just had to crowd, like the District Clerk's records into any open nook we could find in the building. It would be overcrowded and in my opinion, dangerous to work in,

[24] Paul Robert Scott, Harris County Records Management Officer, 1988 - present

manipulating between all of those records. And then the County Clerk, we got the Coffee Pot Building and the County Clerk took the second floor for records and then various departments had the third floor, like district attorney and different ones like that. That building never was that good for records. As a matter of fact, none of them were that good for records. Well, I'll level with you. I wasn't that particularly conscious of these old records myself. Sometimes a newly elected official would come in, "Clean this up, throw it out, I don't want it." So, we'd throw it out. It wasn't no good. Until later, I was determined. I don't know how I could have allowed the court back then to allow records storage space like we really needed it.

But, Ray Hardy[25], the District Clerk, was so obnoxious and he was always fighting for space, but he couldn't get it. And he was a good ole boy, but he was just real obnoxious. Every time something would come up about space and the court members would even pop off in court, "Don't let Ray know it, he'll try to grab it." Just things like that. From what I understand, Ray Hardy did himself in with Commissioner Lyons. You have to realize that Commissioner Lyons at one time was ruling the county himself. People will deny it and say no, but he had a tight control and say in the county. Ray Hardy was wanting something from Commissioner Lyons, he was sitting in his office, and I was there where Ray Hardy jumped up and pounded on his desk and said, "Yes, by God you will do it." And that was the end for Ray Hardy, right then.

As far as getting a Records Manager, I felt all along I needed somebody. I was always trying to find somebody to give me some law to know what I could go by.

[25] Ray Hardy, Harris County District Clerk, 1967 - 1990

District Attorney is going to give you his interpretation of law -- save his and throw everybody else's away. Every judge is going to give an interpretation. And the county attorney, just different ones have their own interpretations and I didn't know enough about the law to know what you could legally do. I knew some of the records you could get rid of them legally. Finally, Dick Raycraft and I, going over different things like that, we came up with the idea that we needed a Records Manager. So, we got that through the court. Originally, Dick had said it would be under me. And I was thinking, no. Everyone of them I've had fights with over all of that and it's just going to be a continuous fight if this guy goes into office and says I'm from McCain's office. And I told Mr. Raycraft, "Look, you're the money man. It needs to be under you. Because when he goes in and says I'm from Mr. Raycraft's office, they are going to pay attention then because you've got control of their money." So that's why when Paul Scott first came, he was under Dick Raycraft and later, as it should be, it's back under Facilities now. But, all of the hurt and pain is gone now and we pretty well have the system worked out. It's just been a long fight to integrate anybody else into that.

JACKSON: Can you talk about the conditions of the records when they were in these storage places? Andrew Johnson[26] was telling me about going into some of these places and finding the records that were just a mess, they were horrible.

McCAIN: They were a mess and horrible. Sometimes they had water damage or had just aged so bad or rats or something had eaten part of them and all. There was just nobody keeping those old records.

[26] Andrew Johnson, Inventory Manager, Facilities and Property Management, 1990 - present

JACKSON: How did it change when Paul Scott started?

McCAIN: When Paul Scott started, I think he bit off the top dog, Ray Hardy, at first. That, and he was nipping at some of the JPs and all. Cause it's easier to work that way. But, he was taking them all on and he used some law where they couldn't throw what they thought they knew, but the law said. He did real good at making them understand, "This we need to save but this you don't have to save." Consequently, Carl Smith, on his first floor, that big storeroom down at 101 Crawford, had so many old records – some of them were very valuable, but some of them were useless, but he just stored everything. And then when the new tax collector came in, he didn't see any sense in all that. Some of it could go, but he didn't have the means of cataloging it and really handling it the way it should have been. Consequently, there are a lot of records that disappeared down there, but nobody knew. It was ignorance on everybody's part. And, nobody could think about what good is that going to do down the line.

JACKSON: Did they get the Records Warehouse while you were Building Superintendent?

McCAIN: Yes, 601 Lockwood? Yes. I was involved in buying that and assigning all of that space. We had the Sheriff's Department and it turned out to be a good building. We were having problems because of dilapidated conditions at 101 Crawford and it not housing what we would like it to have, we had to get out of that building. And it wasn't worth going to the expense to try to buy it and rehabilitate it to our needs. So we went to 601 Lockwood, that building wasn't designed for that purpose, but it handled this real good, where we had a good system for having the records in that one building back there. And then we had Purchasing Inventory on one side and the

Sheriff's Department contraband upstairs. There was an elevator connected to where it could go to surplus to be auctioned off. It came down that elevator and shot right out there. Used to we'd lose stuff, it being moved around sometimes, so it was trying to eliminate as much of that as we could. The Sheriff's Department, their detective division which is still operating out of there, it turns out that is a good location for them, like Narcotics and Vice and all them, working out of there. Because 101 Crawford, a lot of the officers dressed and looked like the clientele that was walking the streets down there. It was nothing for one of these officers to be accosted by female prostitutes, not knowing he was an officer, and he couldn't tell her he was one. That was comical. I think that's all we put in there.

JACKSON: I think we have covered this for today. Can you think of anything to add about Building Services?

McCAIN: One interesting thing, Mr. Harry Washburn[27], was the county auditor and Washburn Tunnel is named after him because it wasn't until they got his support, were they able to get the money to do the bonds to put that in. But Mr. Washburn ruled the county, he and Squatty. But Squatty deferred to the county auditor. And we have often talked about the times since then that we have not had a county auditor like Mr. Washburn. But, man, he, some of the things that go on now, Mr. Washburn would not have allowed back then. He's dead now, but he did imbibe a good bit. While I was working out at the annex, I was friends with one of these janitors downtown that took care of Mr. Washburn during the day. And he had a key to the back door, in and out, and Mr. Washburn they had to escort to get him out and get

[27] Harry L. Washburn, Harris County Auditor, 1912 – 1954

him home. Brownie was his name, he took care of him. And if Mr. Washburn wanted another bottle or something, Brownie would go get it. That his deal, that was all he did.

So, therefore, Mr. Washburn knew me a little bit and I remember one time at the annex out there, the only office that had carpet was in Judge Thompson's office, private office. I needed a vacuum cleaner. My boss told me, "You won't ever get that. Mr. Washburn won't approve of it." One day I told him, "I need a vacuum cleaner real bad." He said, "Why the hell don't you get it?" Just different things like that would tickle me, sometimes when they try to tell me he won't go for it and I'd have a way to get around and shoot the bull with him a little bit. You can get things like that sometimes, it wasn't but $250 for a vacuum cleaner, a very small item back then. We used to save a lot of material in remodeling and try to figure out a way to use it over again until it got going so fast and furious you had to send it to the dump to eliminate it because it wasn't worth anything to you anymore. But at one time you held onto scraps of wire, a lot of stuff you held onto to keep up the repairs to the buildings.

JACKSON: One thing I forgot to mention earlier that I wanted to talk over with you and this relates to Building Services, is your relationship with your employees. People who I've met just glow when they talk about having you as a boss. They always felt that you encouraged them to make the best out of what they were doing. Was this an attitude of yours or a policy?

McCAIN: I guess it was an attitude. I'd tell them, I'd be pretty rough and sometimes I'd have run-ins with them, but most of them became friends, friendly after that. It was

amazing. A lot of times I'd have run-ins with people and we'd become friends. I was always preaching to them, even the janitors, "Don't just stay on this job. Use this money to get a better education or to better yourself. Try to better yourself in this department or if you can, go to another department." And then janitors, I'd let them know, "I don't care if you find a job that's better or even if you think it's better, you go take it. And you don't even have to give me notice, you just call and tell me, 'I found this better job and I'm leaving.' It won't be struck against you by not giving me notice." That was the attitude I had. During 1985 when everything cratered, I had different ones that were making back then sixty, seventy, or eighty thousand dollars. They'd be coming to me for a job to see if I could hire them. And, they were overqualified. I didn't have anything, I just didn't have the positions. Except back then I had a good number of janitors and we weren't contracting all together then. We were slow under me about contracting out, but I had the janitors. And what I would do, I'd tell them, "Now look, I've got a janitor's job, but I'm ashamed to mention it to you. If you take it, you'll work from 5:00 at night till 1:00 in the morning. Then you can go home and get some sleep and get up and go looking for a job the next morning. The only thing I want, is if you agree to take it, give me eight hours for eight hours pay. Just be honest with me and do that and we won't have any problems. And if you just pick up the phone some day and say, 'Hey, I got me another job,' that's fine with me, I expect you to take it." Now that was one of the attitudes that I had and I always had that attitude, anytime they could better themselves.

When I became Building Superintendent, there were some guys that I thought were real good and even before I became Building Superintendent, I was wondering about certain ones and why they didn't get promoted or something. We'd hire somebody new and put them on another job and pay him more money because this other ole boy was satisfied and doing it and all that stuff. And that irritated me. I said, "Man, if that man is doing a good job there they'd say, 'You have to train someone else and we already trained. . .,' I don't care. That man deserves a better job." And that's the attitude I had. And, I was amazed at that attitude down here at that time. They put you in a job and you were stuck there.

JACKSON: Was this attitude racially related at all? Did you find it more often with the black employees than white employees? Because in the 1970s things were beginning to turn around.

McCAIN: In 1974, 1976, the county was integrated real good, like in the cafeteria and all, you didn't hear all that. The leaders of the city and county had their heads together and they didn't do any of that. Squatty Lyons went to the cafeteria in the basement of the Criminal Courts Building and Dee Derrington had the attitude he wasn't going to serve. Squatty walked down there, and they were good buddies and all, but he walked down and told him, "Dee, I'm giving you an order. You better knock it off or we are going to kick you out of here. Because we are not going for that any more. You take everybody that comes in here."

An interesting sideline story, we had a woman working in there, a colored lady. And back then, the restrooms were colored and white, so the colored women's restroom was back going toward the engine room and boiler, the big boilers we had

back then were there, we don't have them now, they're smaller, more efficient, but the water to flush those commodes was running close to those boilers and it would get real hot. She flushed and burned herself. And she told Commissioner Lyons and she told me and we just told her to send him the bill. He went to court and got her doctor bill paid for. But, as Building Superintendent, I'd run into places that was colored and whites all over.

JACKSON: Even in the 1970s.

McCAIN: Yes, and I'd tell them, take that sign down. It was amazing people in the building didn't notice it or care or worrying about it being changed, but when I'd see it, we'd take it down and change it. That was a little place in La Porte and a resident deputy for the Sheriff's Department lived down there in a little court room with a jail on the second floor. They had resident deputies there in La Porte and he later became a Constable out there, was elected Constable, he was Jake Busey. And then we had later, after he became Constable, he had a lieutenant, well he went on up and finally became Major White in the Sheriff's department, but he was a resident deputy for the Sheriff's department. They had resident deputies in some of these areas. Tomball, they had a resident deputy out there and the little holding cells were a part of his house too.

JACKSON: Did you feel that the county departments were integrated as far as employment was concerned?

McCAIN: No. I don't know and I can't imagine that I ever allowed the color of anybody to interfere. All I wanted was a good job out of them. I do know that there has been some of the minorities that complained about me being racially biased but I've had

some commissioners that they've gone to, "You're not talking about Mac because he's not like that. So don't give us that." They just wanted to throw it out. And actually, Commissioner Lee[28] was one that told them, "You know Mac doesn't care what color you are or who you are, if he's going to tell it to you something, he'll tell you whether you're a judge, what color you are, or who it is. So don't give me that bull. He don't discriminate." I appreciated that from him.

JACKSON: But, you felt there were other departments in the county that were not quick to integrate.

McCAIN: Yea, there were other departments that would keep some employees and minorities on menial jobs. And, sometimes, you would wonder, I would think, they've been on that job a long time, getting smarter, why can't they go some place else. But, they wouldn't. But I was tickled any time an employee, if I knew they were going to school, I was tickled, I didn't care who they were.

JACKSON: This is May 19, 2005, and the third in a series of interviews with Mac McCain concerning Harris County and how it functions. Before we discuss how the politics of the county should and did work, I would like to get back to your position for a minute as Building Superintendent. These two slogans were reported to me during the last two weeks as being used during your tenure as Building Superintendent. The first is "fix it first, fight about it later" and the second is "you're right, it's not your job, give me your keys." Do you want to comment on those? Is that accurate?

McCAIN: A lot of times we have breakdowns and everybody would be wondering what to do and all and I was very fortunate in having the court's support that I'd say, I'd just

[28] El Franco Lee, Harris County Commissioner, Precinct 1, 1985 - present

tell everybody to get it fixed and get it back in operation. We'll argue about that later. All I would do then is put a letter in court and they declared it an emergency, a catastrophe or something and pay the bill. That happened quite often and it was really and truly an emergency. I did not see any sense in standing around when we were trying to figure out what to do, when we knew that it had to be done anyway. What was the other one?

JACKSON: The other one was "you're right, it is not your job, give me your keys."

McCAIN: I had some employees that used the expression to me that "it's not my job." On occasion, I have said that you are right, let me have your keys. Boy, that would change their attitude in a hurry. There was a lot of that going around and I figured that if I was there, and I don't care if it was one of my supervisors, who was the top dog there who had the say over everybody else in the department, because we had a problem and we did not have time to mess around and find out whose in charge and whether it is their job or not and if work is going on, just get in there and help do it. Usually I would try to keep everybody working at their classified job or whatever we had them working on, but sometimes we had an emergency and somebody would throw that to me.

JACKSON: Can you give me an example of an emergency? What would constitute an emergency, what type of situation?

McCAIN: Well, I remember one time at the Family Law Center we had an employee there that was very meticulous in his dress -- not that he was wearing a suit -- and his shoes shined real good and everything just looked real nice, and I was over there wading in the water. We had a water line break and it's flooding and I looked at him and I says,

"Get busy." "Well, that's not my job." I said, "Hell if it isn't, I just told you, I just made it your job." And also, he said something about his shoes, he did not want to mess his shoes up. I said, "Then you better go barefoot then." Just stuff like that.

JACKSON: It was primarily a maintenance type of problem.

McCAIN: He was really wanting to be a lady's man and wanting to look real good all the time and I was down there and my shoes was getting that water on them too. I tell you he said the wrong thing about those shoes, messing his shoes up and I had a building to try to save. That didn't go over too well.

There was one guy, I do not mind telling you his name, Sam Jimmy Lucas. Every time he would say "that is not my job." One time in the Criminal Courts Building, we had a severe water break and trying to get control of it and I walked by Sam, and his regular job duties was to go around the sand urns and take the cigarette butts out and stir the sand. I walked by and I said "Sam, get in there, get up there and get to work." He said, "That is not my job." I let him have it too. Sam, he was a good old man, but his mentality just had him like that. He was just doing what he was told to do, like he was programmed. He did not care if the building was falling down around him. I had to break him of that.

JACKSON: While you were Building Superintendent, did you have to deal with any natural disasters? Because Allison was after you left. Carla was before you began.

McCAIN: No, I was here in Carla.

JACKSON: But you weren't Building Superintendent.

McCAIN: No, I was not Building Superintendent. There was another storm after that, during Carla I stayed at the annex, took my family and just stayed at the Annex out

there and barricaded the front doors and got into the courtroom. If the storm did hit or break the glass there, the family and everybody was centered right there in the courtroom. There were benches that we could get under and keep from the falling debris and all.

But, there was another storm, I forget the name of that hurricane. It was supposed to go down below Freeport and Palacios, back down in there, and I had been to a party, for Mike Driscoll[29] at the Shamrock, at their ballroom there, and we were all talking about, "Oh yeah, it is going to be coming in down there." We weren't worried about it. So I went ahead and -- I had an apartment at that time -- and went to the apartment. When I was Building Superintendent I kept the radio on during storms to try to keep abreast of what was going on. Anyway, all of a sudden I jolted up out of bed and it was coming in and going to hit Galveston. I may think of the name of that storm, but anyway, it blew a lot of glass out of the building down here and the glass falling down. But anyway, I jumped up out of bed, I already had my rain slicker and everything ready to go and I just grabbed that and slipped some clothes on and hit the car. I had a pick-up truck at that time and just headed down to town. I'm listening to the radio on high, wait a minute, all that wind is blowing. So I got up and coming in on I-45, I got along side an eighteen-wheeler, there was not much traffic out at that time, that eighteen-wheeler, and I was riding along and it was taking on wind. All of sudden I heard on the radio that over on Highway 59 there was an eighteen-wheeler that had just been blown off the highway and overturned. I thought, oh no, wait a minute, I speeded up and got away from that eighteen-wheeler

[29] Mike Driscoll, Harris County Attorney, 1981 - 1995

and got on down here. We just stayed in the office down here. We had to get food from the sheriff's department through the tunnel. We got food like that. We had a skeleton crew, ones that could get in, got in here.

JACKSON: Was there a lot of damage to the county buildings down here?

McCAIN: There was a good bit of damage to the county buildings. Most of it was out in the precincts though. I should remember the name because there was a fund set up for that unit that they charged everything to it. Anyway, but as far as the big disasters, we never had any. Oh, let's see, it wasn't a disaster, but I remember the jail, we had the jail at 301 San Jacinto, it was in the back of the Criminal Courts Building, and one time the Chief Deputy, Gus George[30] called me and he says, "Mac, we are going to need some help from you. We got these vans out there loaded up with these protesters, they are Iranians, and they are just tearing the vans up and all and just banging on them." He said, "What can you do? We have got to bring them somewhere." I said, "Bring them to the basement of the Criminal Courts Building. Put your guards on the exits and we will block off the exit to the building and all those exits." We had that well controlled and had all the exists blocked. We just let them sit there and bang on those vans, and it was getting hot in there too, but there was nothing else, we were not going to let them out on the streets or let them out, it would be hard to contain.

JACKSON: When was this?

McCAIN: That was back when we were having a controversy about Iran. Let's see, I can't remember.

[30] Gus George, Chief Deputy, Harris County Sheriff's Office, 1973 - 1983

JACKSON: Was that when the American Embassy was taken over.

McCAIN: Yes.

JACKSON: During that time?

McCAIN: Yes.

JACKSON: Okay, what I would like to discuss today is basically politics in Harris County. You know, we all learn in school the way government is supposed to work. Then we grow up and enter the real world and we find out how it really does work and politics is a big part of how Government works at all levels -- county, state, national. But what I would like to do is talk about Harris County and the first thing I would like to talk about is elections and how elections were held in the county and basically different things about them. For example, we've touched on this before, but what was the role of county employees in elections for re-electing officials.

McCAIN: If they were working for an official, it was sort of understood and never could be told, but you worked and you did what you could there for them, but you always did it on your own time or took comp time and that happened quite often. Actually, you did it and people were doing it. But you remember the attitude there was that we are working for our job too. I will tell you another thing, when Kyle Chapman came into office in Precinct 1, I think there was a guy named Townsend[31] that he beat, and he went to his camp which was at Dixie Drive and McGowan. He went there and got all the employees, which were not all that many back then. He says, "I know that you work for the other man and I don't blame you, I actually respect you for that, for sticking by your boss. But now, if you're going to stay here, I expect you to have

[31] J. R. Townsend, Harris County Commissioner, Precinct 1, 1947 – 1950

your allegiance to me just like you did him and support me. We won't have any problems." That went over pretty good. He had a lot of faithful employees there. But, a lot of elected officials that go into office just did away with everybody, they had to have a complete change over. That was the knowledge that they were losing and they were really stupid to do it that way, because the poor devil that is working there, he more or less had to support his boss.

JACKSON: Did many officials do that? When they changed office did they come in and clear it out, of all the employees? Bring in all their own people.

McCAIN: That's right.

JACKSON: Yes, I could see where that would be a tremendous problem.

McCAIN: Then, as far as space and as far as all that goes, they pretty well inherited what they had run for, and then we would try to work in some remodeling to help them for the fact that they had to look like they were making a showing after running and getting that job. But you have to realize back then, it was all Democrats, just like here, these days, you have Republicans. Democrats had control, but there was a good Democrat party and organization that kept everybody in line. One main Democrat was Everitt Collier, the editor of the Houston *Chronicle*. Really, over at the Rice Hotel, the Capital Room, more deals were struck there then any place and if you didn't have his support, if a judge had passed away and the reappointment judge, he had to have his support for the governor to appoint you to that job. Then, if you were running for re-election, you needed his support. If you got crossways, he did not mind tearing you up in his paper too. Those were interesting days, but fortunately I knew his top secretary or top assistant. I knew him, but if I knew her, I would call her

before I would call him. At my level, I could approach her, get a lot of things done, just make a phone call to her.

JACKSON: What kind of things would you call him about?

McCAIN: Something that was in the paper that was wrong. I would keep trying to straighten some of that out and she would help try to get some of it straight. Also, sometimes I would plant a story with her that would help. They evidentially thought it was beneficial or they would not have done anything with it. Incidentally, her name was Fonticas, and she was so good that when they sold the *Chronicle*, part of the deal was that they keep her on as a consultant for the rest of her life. She is now over ninety years old. So every Friday, I understand from her nephew, Red McKaskle[32] was her nephew, he just retired as Chief Deputy here. He was with the state system before, but anyway that was his aunt. A few years ago he said that she goes down there every Friday, somebody drives her down there, she picks up a check.

JACKSON: Nice retirement. You just touched on the importance of the Democratic Party as such, but Republicans were starting to make in-roads too. What was the significance of the Republican Party versus the Democratic Party and county politics and when did that change come?

McCAIN: I don't know of the difference in their platforms, it's only that if you had a Republican that wanted that Democrat's job. They had to start making some steps in the in-roads of getting them in. It took them a long time, it was real hard for them do. It's just like right now, the Republicans having control and Democrats don't get anything. They do not get any support at all. Well, they have support, but the

[32] D. V. "Red" McKaskle, Chief Deputy, Harris County Sheriff's Office, 1995 – 2005

Republicans launch is larger support on their side. Platforms, I never did understand the platforms, everyone wanted a county job. They did not particularly care or know what the platforms were, just a very few of them, Democrats and Republicans, were really understanding some of the politics and platforms and all.

JACKSON: When the Republicans began say in the early 1970s, did the Democratic Party see it as much of a threat?

McCAIN: You know, that was what was a little wrong with the Democrats. They had the attitude that they would live forever. They did not come to bat soon enough. I remember when George Bush, Sr. was running for representative and he would make his rounds.

End Tape 3 – Side A

Begin Tape 3 – Side B

JACKSON: Why don't you start with George Bush.

McCAIN: If you would go by Fern's headquarters, she was usually there. She had a front desk right at the entry way. It was arranged so that you had to stop and see her before you could even go to the back. He would want to go back and talk with some of the volunteer workers. She would say, "No, they are too busy and I do not want to stop them from work." But I remember seeing him, I had met him and all during the campaign trip, but I remember some of the poses I see now with that coat thrown over his shoulders and I remember on 43rd Street where our headquarters usually was, I saw him walking across the parking lot there with that coat thrown over his shoulders. But nobody got too mad at each other, he was just getting as far as he could and she just didn't let him get any further. Back then, in that kind of politics though, it wasn't

as aggressive and mean like it is now. You would run your election, lose or win, that was it. Everybody would talk to each other, most everybody, on friendly terms, they just wanted a job.

But I remember another thing, is that Commissioners Court was meeting on the eighth floor of the Criminal Courts Building. That was set aside for the Commissioners Court back then. In the cafeteria down in the basement, those Commissioners would have a knock-down drag-out fight in court and you would think that they wanted to kill each other. If you would go on around and go down to the cafeteria a little bit before court was over, they would be sitting down there, you did not have that rule if you had three of them in there you would have a quorum, so all of them would go down there and sit and mingle. They would just be dying laughing talking to each other. "But boy did I get you." That was quite comical to see all that.

The Republicans started getting a few offices and the reason that they were getting a few offices back then was because you had some weak Democrats that were being supported just because they were Democrats and you had more Democratic voters. Frankly, the Republican Party is doing now what the Democrats did and the Republican Party is consuming itself. Part of that went way back to the Democrats where they got all this power and they forgot who they were and where they were. They had all the power. The Republicans are feeding on themselves and the Democrats were feeding on their selves back then. Of course, they did not have an opposing party, they didn't have anybody else to feed on. They had to feed on each other, and that is what is going on now.

I think it may take another twenty years and it's going to turn. The Democrats have a lot of organizations. There was what was called the Moderate Democrats and we met at the union hall out off Telephone Road. Their main union hall was out there. We had our meeting and a lot of those leaders had offices in the Moderate Democrats. The Moderate Democrats was a huge organization. They would put on what they called their tomalatas.

JACKSON: Their what?

McCAIN: Tomalata, it was tamales and drink and all at the El Dorado, that golf course out on Atascocita. They would put that on every year and have a fund raiser and sell a lot of tickets for that.

JACKSON: Was the Moderate Democrats where labor came into the Democratic Party?

McCAIN: Yes, you had the moderates in labor that would come in, but most of them wanted to be called Moderate Democrats. That was a good name, it sounded good and there was a lot of support.

Then you had Bayou City Democratic Women; it was a huge organization at one time back then. I was hanging around so much mainly because Squatty, for some reason, felt okay with me with Fern. I would be helping and keeping her straight sometimes and helping her out and all that, so he didn't have a problem with it. The Bayou City Democratic Women had a lot of members and I run into a lot of them now that have since turned Republican. But there were a bunch of them that opened their houses out in River Oaks and have huge reception parties for one politician or another. It went over real good.

There was another party that was called the 414 Democrats that was real strong. You didn't pay any dues to it, you just had your name on the mailing list and from time to time you would give them some money if you wanted to. Norman Krebs and his wife Vivian Krebs started that. It was named 414 -- Commissioner Precinct 4, Constable Precinct 1 and Constable Precinct 4. That was where you get your 414. They would send out a mailing and they would have it on Saturdays, especially during election time, they would use the Picadilly Cafeteria Northline. We would get that sucker and get it open by 7:00 in the morning and they would be cooking breakfast. They would show up maybe a little earlier than that and we would have that place full and the parking lot, be full of people, showing up, people would rally for certain politicians. The 414 Democrats didn't particularly sponsor any particular candidate, but they had it there if they wanted to come. If they wanted to contribute some money to help keep that going, that was all right too. Also, you could buy tickets for the event and get your breakfast. Man, there has been some pretty famous people, Democrats showed up there, talking and all. That was an interesting organization. It was so loosey-goosey you never could figure out how it was run. Norman and Vivian Krebs singularly put it together and ran that sucker and they did a good job of it.

JACKSON: Was Norman Krebs one of the constables?

McCAIN: No.

JACKSON: Then where did they get the Commissioner 4, Constable 1, Constable 4?

McCAIN: Commissioner Squatty Lyons was the Democratic Commissioner, Constable Rankin was the Constable of Precinct 1 and at that time we had a Democrat Constable out in Precinct 4, so there is 414.

JACKSON: And they were supporting them?

McCAIN: Well, they named it that because that was their rallying point, that that was who they were really supporting but they were supporting other candidates too.

JACKSON: So, what time period was this going on because election laws and campaign finance and things I think impinged some of this.

McCAIN: You know, it lasted out there, I'm scared to say, up into the late eighties, I think. I run into old timers now that still talk about the tomalatas we used to have out there, they were something else They were a big blow out, usually had a band, plenty of food and drink and all that. Anybody could come up and do their speaking if they wanted to. They would get on a list and then be called up to do their speaking. It was really to support those three elected officials, 414. In that time, the Westside Republicans were creeping in out there. They were pretty well entrenched on the West Side. You could just about give up the west side of the county now. They did their door to door walking and knocking and talking and all that. They did their grass roots and to me at one time the Democrats did that. Squatty Lyons had four children and Fern and it was nothing to see them going up and down the street putting a sign in a business. They'd take off and just go up and down the street into businesses, knock on their door and tell them who they were and they really canvassed the area. Of course you didn't have that large of a population back then, it was sort of easier to get to the majority of the people. You never could get to all of them, even back then.

JACKSON: You have discussed the organizations within the Democratic Party or some of them. But I know that there were social organizations you talked about earlier, the Eagles and that is how you really got your start in local politics was through your membership in the Eagles. But there were other social organizations, fraternal organizations that also were important for politicians. So, what was the role of these fraternal organizations?

McCAIN: Actually the Shriners.

JACKSON: Shriners?

McCAIN: It was quite big then.

JACKSON: The Arabia Temple?

McCAIN: Yes, and then, well really and truly as far as the Eagles were concerned, the one on Broadway was real active and had a lot of support, but the big one was downtown, Number 63 and it was on Louisiana Street. You will find that a lot of judges had been an Eagle. It was not that much to become an Eagle. I would run into a lot of them, Judge Hatten[33] who is the oldest one now, he was the head of the Eagles for so long, nationwide he was strong in the Eagles.

This lady, I forget her name at sixty-three, this is a little nasty, but she put out a card, you had to buy it, it was called a turtle card, so you would buy it and then in the future, the pass word on that was, they asked you, "Are you a turtle?" The answer was the only one you could give, "You bet your sweet ass I am." So, anyway it went on and at one time at a party, I think it was her 90th birthday, I asked Judge Hatten if

[33] William M. Hatten, Judge, County Criminal Court at Law #2, 1964 – 1968; District Criminal Court #176, 1968 - 1988

he was an Eagle and he said, "You bet your sweet ass I am." He didn't holler it so loud. The story is if you didn't answer right and you were and you were ashamed to say it and you were actually one, then you had to buy drinks for the house. So then there was an astronaut one time and one of the members on the ground asked him, "Are you a turtle?" He said, "I can't answer that." He couldn't answer. But that was the only answer he could have given, so boy they racked him up for drinks when he got back.

JACKSON: Also, I have run across the group called the Jesters.

McCAIN: The Jesters are the upper class of the Shriners. They thought they were a little better than Shriners. They were up in the elite. So you had the Jesters, that's right. I was including them with the Shriners, but I tell you the Jesters and nearly everyone I knew like that, Squatty and all the old judges, they were Jesters. They put on some hellacious parties.

JACKSON: How much of the business of the county do you think was conducted in these organizations with those guys just sitting around having a couple of drinks and discussing things?

McCAIN: That was nearly the way everything was run. From my prospective though, the Democrats were all buddies and all this stuff, so they could pretty well come to terms on what worked out pretty good. But the Republicans now need that, but there is some reason I feel they are fighting among their selves and they don't really trust each other. So they're getting things done and they're winning because of the vast majority of them now. For some reason you do not have that old camaraderie like you did back then. That is like I was telling you, about the Capital Bar and Grill over

at Rice. That was right across the street from the *Chronicle*. Lawyers and everybody that was anybody went there. It was see and be seen. If you got a chance to shoot the bull with somebody, you might get a chance to plug your buddy or plug yourself.

JACKSON: So, a lot of this was just part of your daily life, it was how you ran business. You went over to the Capital Bar and Grill and had lunch or something and ran into somebody.

McCAIN: Percy Foreman was a famous lawyer back then and he had a table there with his office and phone set up there. It wasn't his main office, but that was reserved for him. He did a lot of business there. The story goes about Percy Foreman, once you hired him, you knew they were guilty or they wouldn't have hired him.

Judge Hatten and I think it was Hugo Touchy[34], when they first started a partnership, one of their clients was this black guy that stole a chicken. It was a young kid and they were trying to figure out some defense for him and they got in court though and they asked for -- this has always been uncomfortable for me -- where they asked that the prosecutor produce the *corpus delicti* -- the chicken had been eaten already -- and that got a controversy. The judge threw up his hands and said, "I am going to dismiss this case." I don't know, there were a lot of things that were settled back then a lot different then what they are now.

JACKSON: What were the chances of someone who was not a part of this system, getting anything accomplished?

McCAIN: You couldn't.

[34] Hugo A. Touchy, Justice of the Peace, Precinct 1-1; Judge, County Civil Court at Law #3, 1975 – 1983; Civil District Court # 129, 1984 - 1997

JACKSON: Couldn't get a thing done.

McCAIN: No.

JACKSON: So, as a citizen if you went in front of Commissioner's Court with a petition, an idea or something like that, nothing would happen unless you had worked the politics or had gotten someone to sponsor it for you?

McCAIN: It depends on how logical it was. If it was quite logical that it should be done, that wasn't anything. But if you had something with a little controversy, you better have some support or they would just shoot you down right there. Who was it, let's see, I heard the other night about the politics at the Capitol. There was a senator, I mean Goldberg and another one that was in office with him. The two of them would have knock-down drag-out fights on the floor, go back to the coat room, get their coat, then go out and have drinks together and laugh about it. There was not anything like that up there now. If they would get back to some of that style, you would get a lot of things settled. They can't get anything settled the way they are now.

JACKSON: What do you think the problem is?

McCAIN: Oh, part of it is diminishing authority of the Democrats, but the Republicans have that authority but they are not using a fair hand. You see sometimes when you have the authority, you need to be more fair about it, and that doesn't mean that just because you have the authority the other man is completely wrong. So it's better to get together and work something out.

JACKSON: This fits into another area I wanted to talk about which was what happened when women and minorities started to enter politics? It has only been really within

the last twenty to twenty-five years in Harris County that women or minorities have been in politics.

McCAIN: The white women were able to enter a little easier then the minorities. Black women or female minorities, it was just hard for any of them to win. The women or the minorities, but it has changed now, nobody seems to worry about the color. Jack Heard[35], when he was running for mayor of Houston, one thing that cost him that race, everybody was down on Kathy[36], but Jack Heard, the big old hulk, stood way over Kathy, she was a little old bitty thing, and he would start talking or debating and say "little lady" and talk like that to her and people got teed off at him, not only that, but some of his other attitudes. She beat him. I can always remember him standing up there and always looking at her and saying, "little lady." I was thinking he better be careful, she might give you a fight, because I knew her, she was a pretty good fighter.

JACKSON: So, do you think that campaign and election reform and the way politics was handled allowed women and minorities to get more of a toe hold which helped to break down the system or does the system still exist, it's just in a different form?

McCAIN: I would say that the system still exists, it has not been diminished by the female or minorities being in there though, but you still have the system that is worked out to be today, what it is today. The entire system has changed for all of us. But I couldn't say that the women or the minorities diminished that part. Am I making sense?

[35] Jack Heard, Sheriff, Harris County Sheriff's Office, 1970 - 1984
[36] Kathyrn J. Whitmire, Mayor, City of Houston, 1982 - 1991

JACKSON: Yes, yes it does. The question wasn't terribly good. Let's back up a little bit because I want to talk about a couple of things that happened with elections. First of all, I want you to talk about redistricting the precincts and why they would do that. For example, I know at one time they thought they could get rid of Squatty Lyons by changing his boundaries. If you want to talk about that redistricting problem.

McCAIN: Squatty Lyons and Precinct 4 used to be out Katy highway and south of that and swing back to a little north of that. They started redistricting, when they redistricted he moved on over and on over.

JACKSON: Going north and east?

McCAIN: Yes. And, they were really trying to redistrict to get rid of him, but the Republicans or while the Republican voter was out there in those areas, they still had their faith in Squatty Lyons. Now, whether it was a Democratic or Republican, so therefore it was hard for them to do. I know that at one time he had six or seven opponents in the primary and usually you have a fight, a runoff in the primary. He beat all of them hands down in the primary. I remember Larry McKaskle[37] who was a city councilman, he was one of the opponents and he told me later on, he said, "Man, I learned a good lesson, I sure wasted my money on that. He's got it sewed up," and he did.

There was a joke going around that when Squatty would go into a precinct, he'd fix all the roads up. Then he would get redistricted and go to next one. He would fix all the roads up and then they would redistrict it again. Toward the last there when he got into Humble, back in there, old Jamie Bray was commissioner over

[37] Larry McKaskle, Houston City Councilman, 1979 - 1991

there and he laid it out big. He stripped everything out of every camp there. They did not have a chair, they did not have anything. Usually some of that equipment was all Government or county equipment.

But also, one time when they were redistricting, the County Judge, Lindsay, lived on Kuykendahl, and he was in Precinct 3 which was Commissioner Eckels' precinct and when he did the switch and he came under Squatty, Squatty's superintendent, Smokey Jasper went out there looking at the road. The judge lived, Spring Creek was down here, but the judge lived sort of on his own -- had acreage back there -- at the end of that road, but the road upkeep stopped way back up here. Jasper was confused about why nothing had been done down there. But see, Lindsay and Commissioner Eckels were at each others throat. Anyway, Smokey Jasper went up to his door and knocked and he said, "Judge, is there some reason you don't want anything done to this road out here?" He thought that well maybe the Judge doesn't want anything done to it. He said, "No, I never could get anything done."

JACKSON: So, Smokey fixed the road?

McCAIN: Oh yeah. As Commissioner he wanted all the roads fixed. He wasn't like that. That reflected on him if it wasn't in good shape. He wouldn't be like that, just knock the judge out. If he had an argument he would knock them some other way, but wouldn't pull that kind of stuff. But Bob Eckels didn't care. Although I will reiterate, I think I have said it before, Bob Eckels again was a friend of mine. But you just had to sit back and laugh about the stuff that was going on all over the place. He'd have it out with one, that one would be telling it or someone would tell me

about it and I said to Eckels, "What do you think"? "Got him didn't I?" Stuff like that. Did I ever tell you about Bob Eckels putting in the heliport out here?

JACKSON: Yes, you told that. And not giving you the key.

McCAIN: One time when he was dating and Beltway 8 out there by Town & County had that long esplanade, wide area there, but he landed there, the helicopter and crew, took this girl over for lunch and boy the highway boys got him on that. So, he would do all kind of stuff.

Back up, I told Commissioner Radack[38] from Precinct 3 now, he came after -- well Liz Ghrist[39] held that Precinct 3 for a while -- after Commissioner Eckels left and prior to that there was Bill Elliott[40], was commissioner out there and there was also a county judge earlier [named Bill Elliott]. So that Bill Elliott rode a motorcycle, a commissioner, and rode out there off of all those dunes and all back in there. He had a shotgun and he loved to ride his motorcycle and ride up and catch these kids in their car, I guess scared the devil out of them. Anyway, just stuff like that, and he was a halfway nut.

Then, along comes Eckels. He was just different, that commissioner was just different to everything you could think a commissioner should be. Even Eckels was too. I told Radack down here one time, I said, "You know I am wondering what's in that water out there that makes all you commissioners that come from there the same temperament." Radack, we can kid and argue with each other. When he was a constable he got cross ways with Commissioner Eckels. You see it was out in Eckels

[38] Steve Radack, Harris County Commissioner, Precinct 3, 1989 - present
[39] Elizabeth Lyons Ghrist, Harris County Commissioner, Precinct 3, 1988
[40] William F. "Bill" Elliott, Harris County Commissioner, Precinct 3, 1969 - 1972

precinct. Eckels got mad about some space he was occupying in that building on Chimney Rock and Eckels had the say over the building there then, and he told me you go out there and move him out, take that space away from him. I said, "Well, what are you going to use that space for?" He said, "I don't know, one of these days I will think of something." He just wanted him out of that space and he had to go. Radack quite often throws it up about, "Yeah, there's McCain, he threw me out of my office one time and took my office away from me."

JACKSON: Where did you move him to?

McCAIN: We just consolidated him more there, and moved in that building and also I think part of him went over, well that was at Chimney Rock and part of it went back over to the other, I forget where it was located then. But I'm trying to remember the name of that constable that came in, oh what's his name, he was a nut. Commissioner Eckels helped get him elected and then he was sorry after that. He was a character. Tracy Maxon[41]. He was a constable, but he was half crazy. He became Commissioner Eckels' police force. Commissioner Eckels wanted some constables assigned to him from some of the other constables to use. Nobody went with him but Maxon, he went with him. See, he liked having his little force. Anyway, Eckels was the first one that had the patrol, where they got a patrol system. Prior to that, the Sheriff's Department did all the patrol and criminal work and the constable just served civil papers. So Eckels got a number of deputies, but he also got five brand new cars for him.

So one day I was going out to Commissioner Eckels' camp to meet with him and was going down Highway 6 toward Clay Road and over to my right there was

[41] Tracy Maxon, Harris County Constable, Precinct 5, 1974 - 1984

two of those constable cars, just one crashed right into the other, ruined the front end of one and the back end of another one. When I got on down there I said to the commissioner, "Well I got news for you, half of your patrol is sitting up there wrecked on Highway 6." Boy, he took off out of there, he was tearing old Maxon up. He was trying to tell them to get a hold of Maxon and all and he was tearing him up.

I remember one time when I was meeting with Commissioner Eckels out there and Maxon was supposed to be there remodeling, some remodeling that Commissioner Eckels wanted done before Maxon. Maxon wasn't there and Commissioner Eckels was telling them, "Y'all get him here and I'm gonna get him." They were on the radio and you could hear what was going on and Maxon was saying, "Man, I am headed there right now." I heard this siren going in the background. Anyway, he headed there as fast as he could get there and just after he got there I said, "Were you running that emergency here?" He said, "You better bet I was, when he was hollering it was an emergency."

JACKSON: The other thing I wanted to talk about was controversial elections, hard fought battles. For example, I know when Jamie Bray originally won in Precinct 2, it was a shock.

McCAIN: The move was on then for Judge Elliott to get his friends elected and consequently, as you know, Jamie just lived across the street. But, they figured that he could run for 2, V. V. Ramsey[42] had been in a lot of trouble.

JACKSON: He was indicted later, wasn't he?

[42] V. V. Ramsey, Harris County Commissioner, Precinct 2,1953 - 1970

McCAIN: Yeah. So Bray beat him, Bray only served four years, so then the Judge and Bray were sitting there -- Chapman was still there, Squatty Lyons and Commissioner Eckels. Anyway, Bray would make a motion and he would look and say, "That's all right, isn't it, Judge?" If it took a vote and this is gospel truth, if it took a vote and he voted he would say, "Oh, wait a minute, that was wrong Judge?" and change his vote and all that kind of stuff. So it was a joke around here about him just being a yes-boy for Judge Elliott. Jamie Bray told me that he is the captain of my ship. If he sinks, I will sink with him and he did, they both went out of office at the same time.

But you see they came on there and Tom Bass beat Chapman. Well, Chapman was one of the good ole boys, but Tom Bass came in real strong and Elliott and Jamie Bray were supporting him. Tom Bass had an attaché case that was set up about like this, if you set it up on top, on either side, no matter which way it turned, he had Tom Bass bumper stickers on it. He would be at this place and they would be making their speeches and Tom Bass would set his case down and you were going to see who it is, no matter who it is. That would irritate Chapman, who reached over one time and slapped it down.

Anyway, through their efforts, they won and Tom Bass did come in office and he stayed in office for a pretty good while there. Then he was the one, he mainly got behind creating a precinct for minorities, to serve minorities. That is why Precinct 1 was rearranged the way it was. You have to rearrange them according to population. Each one has to have about the same amount of population. There are some other boundary restraints but like districts, but anyway, Commissioner Lee ran for that and when Bass left, Bass wasn't beaten, he left. Commissioner Lee ran for it. I think that

in the primary, I think that he had about five or six opponents there and I think that he did have a run off, but he won. So actually it was the general election that gave him the seat.

JACKSON: Commissioner Lee ran as a Democrat.

McCAIN: Yes, and he is still a Democrat.

JACKSON: Right.

McCAIN: But I remember when all the controversy was going on about the redistricting to join those lines, if you ever notice how they are drawn now, they've cleaned those up a little bit since back then, but I remember Craig Washington[43] was a representative and he made a glowing speech, man he is a good speaker, he's just a statesman. He made a speech about creating that and all and everybody, just not only him, but about creating it. But I particularly remember the speech Craig Washington gave one time.

JACKSON: This was before the minority precinct was created?

McCAIN: He was in favor of changing the line to create this. So then as we go on along though, I get back to where Tom Bass, he actually beat Chapman, but I was pushing cards for Chapman out on Rock Hill at the Civic Club, right side of a little bayou, anyway, Jamie Bray and his superintendent, old Tony Kaleva, they had a motor home, going all over the place now with Tom Bass big signs on it, "Vote for Tom Bass" and all that. Well that sorta was a no-no where one commissioner would get that much into beating an incumbent. That was some hard feeling there, but anyway, they showed up where I was pushing cards, they got out and they had sodas and all

[43] Craig Anthony Washington, State Representative, 1973 – 1982; State Senator, 1983 – 1989; U. S. Representative, 1989 - 1995

for the workers around there, but the campaign headquarters where Chapman was not too far from there, just down on Bellfort, just across Broadway. So I put in my call and he came down there. There had been a rain and they had pulled in alongside this gulley and they had the sidewalk here and then there had been a rain, just rained enough that there was big mud puddles, and anyway, they were sitting in there and Chapman came up and Bray ran and got back in the motor home with Tony Kaleva and locked the door. Chapman's going across there, "Wait a minute, I want you, I want you, come here." He was ready to fight him. But he was out there giving soda water and asking everybody to vote for Tom Bass. So anyway, they got the door locked and Chapman was running up knocking on the door.

End of Tape 3B

Start of Tape 4A

McCAIN: Oh, Chapman ran up to the door, Bray had already locked the door and was looking through this little window, he says, "Hey, Chappy, do you want a coke?" Chapman says, "Hell no, I want your ass you son of a bitch." In the meantime, old Tony Kaleva was having a hard time getting that motor home started. Finally he got it started and all. They were supposed to back out, but all of a sudden when they hit that sidewalk with the mud puddles there, those back wheels, they just spun in that mud hole and they couldn't get out. They had a phone on the motor home and so they had to call a wrecker to come and get them. You know, I was taking pictures of that all that time out there. You won't have them in there because something about politics, I did not want to embarrass Bass and I put them away and I can't figure out where I put them. But there is a good set of pictures.

JACKSON: But when you find them …..

McCAIN: They will be on that Minox, but it is in sequence, showing what was happening there. But of course we didn't think Chapman, nobody really thought Chapman was going to lose though.

JACKSON: What happened? Why do you think that happened?

McCAIN: I don't know, things were changing a little bit there.

JACKSON: When was this, about 1974?

McCAIN: Yeah.

JACKSON: Right about the time you were appointed?

McCAIN: See it was the next election after that because Chapman was still on the court.

JACKSON: 1976?

McCAIN: No, Tom Bass had beat Chapman but I still had my three votes. Fonteno came in and the judge came in and Squatty, and that gave me the three votes. Bob Eckels, it didn't matter to him. So anyway, in 1974, that was when Kyle Chapman took all of his campaign money and there were others that approached Fonteno and told him you are going to run for that job. Fonteno, I think that he had just gotten married to Jo Anne, she was a nice sweet lady, church going lady and all that and she wasn't a politician, but she became one in a hurry. She was a credit to Fonteno. They were a credit to each other. He ran and boy, he beat Jamie Bray.

JACKSON: What was his job before he ran for commissioner? His background?

McCAIN: He was in real estate.

JACKSON: Okay. So he knew a lot of people through that.

McCAIN: Yeah. He had been on the Port Commission too, he had been a municipal court judge in Baytown I know, maybe some other things.

JACKSON: So he had political background.

McCAIN: Yeah. So that was real nice and interesting, but the interesting part was that for two years, Squatty didn't have the buildings from 1972 to 1974. But when the vote changed, they gave the buildings back to them and then he appointed me Building Superintendent.

JACKSON: Now, when they changed the precinct lines, then Commissioner Lee, Precinct 1, got downtown. Previous to that Squatty had it?

McCAIN: No, the lines were changed while Bass was in office. But it was changed with the idea that Bass wanted the minority and he was ready to leave. He was a really a wonderful teacher, a professor out at St. Thomas. He liked that real well. Frankly, Commissioner Bass is a real good man but he had these top aides that ran things and reported to him and that was it. Court day come and whatever they said, he was going to vote that way. That was good and I know Commissioner Bass has Russell Rowell who is one of his top aides, Russell was sort of down with the political bunch in downtown and all that and Nancy Gehman was a tall, strapping woman. She was top superintendent and Squatty used to call her Bass's stud duck.

Anyway, it was pretty good times then. All this has been so interesting that when you see changes coming in positions like I was in, I couldn't help but worry about what was going to come about. But fortunately, nothing ever came about and back then I had to be reappointed every year. I would tell Commissioner Lee in December when my appointment was coming up, I would catch him up here and I

would say, "Okay, bend over," and he would say, "What do you mean?" I would say, "It's kissing time." So that would tickle him. But I had to have three out of five votes to stay on that job. There was no controversy, it always came down.

JACKSON: You brought up how Jo Anne Fonteno had to become a political wife very quickly and we know that Fern very much was a political wife. What was the role of the wives of these commissioners in as far as politics and maintaining their offices?

McCAIN: Fern's role was that she was politically inclined anyway. It wouldn't have surprised me to see her run for commissioner if it was all right back then, but it wasn't. She belonged to so many women's groups and she was president of a lot of them and worked hard at them. That is another thing I forgot about, about all these women's groups that she belonged to. Fern was working at it all the time and she was up getting ready for an election. Jo Anne was thrown into it not knowing anything, because she and Fonteno had just recently been married. Fonteno had to go tell her what Chapman and V. V. Ramsey was mad about Bray. But she told me not long ago that one night they just cornered Fonteno or came by the house maybe, anyway they got hold of him and just flat told him, "The answer is you're going to do it." Then he had to go home and tell her. It was pretty nerve wracking for her, she didn't know what in the world about politics. So, anyway, she came a long ways. Now, as far as she was always active, and I hope I can explain this right, she was active to help Fonteno and she was in a passive way, like Fern was super active, but Jo Anne ran in a circle like her church and all this, but she was always supportive and she did a lot of different things with seniors, and all that. She wasn't down in the nitty-gritty

fighting, like Fern wouldn't mind being down there in the nitty-gritty fighting. I don't know whether I explained that well or not.

JACKSON: Well, you did. Otherwise, were they expected to participate?

McCAIN: As far as Bob Eckels wife, I don't remember her really being that active in his campaign. She would show up at a function and then later they were divorced and he married Mary Francis. Tom Bass's family, they never did. He wanted his family, they were good Catholics, and he wanted them to take care of yourself, I'm supporting you. That was about the attitude there. Ramsey, his wife was sorta, everyone of these ladies are very nice ladies now, she would attend the functions to be on his arm, hold his arm, be with him and there was no dissention between them, but she wasn't out there waving any flags.

JACKSON: Is that true of Kyle Chapman's wife too?

McCAIN: No, she wasn't there. She wasn't that active. She would attend.

JACKSON: Show up where she was required to?

McCAIN: Mike Ramsey, the famous attorney here, he is the son of V. V. Ramsey. They doted on Mike, they did a good job of raising him and he is a darn good attorney now.

JACKSON: We talked a little bit about the barbeques and the fund raisers. Was that the primary way of earning money for your campaign or were there other ways of pulling in the funds?

McCAIN: You would have your political contributors that was going to send you some money anyway, but also the barbeque was to have some way of feeding a big crowd and not charging them too much for the ticket. But also, at times there would be a lot of barbeque tickets bought that were never used. Some supporters would just buy up

a bunch of barbeque tickets and give some of them to a few friends, but the rest of them probably were never used and so therefore the money was there though.

JACKSON: So it was a way of getting money for the campaign, someone to buy one hundred dollars worth of tickets or something, a thousand dollars.

McCAIN: It was more so like that back then then now, these fundraisers that they have now are subtle. Way back then, it was unheard of, or I don't remember any politicians having annual fundraisers. But it is the going thing now for an annual fundraiser to keep their war chest built up. So that anybody will think twice about trying to run against them. I lost my chain now, where were we?

JACKSON: We were talking about the fundraisers and people being able to donate large amounts of money just by buying tickets.

McCAIN: Yeah. That way if a bunch of tickets were sold, even if you just sold ten dollar or twenty-five dollar ticket like that, you didn't really have to keep up with reporting, all the reporting you have to do now. I'll tell you this, there were some popular places for fundraisers. One was El Dorado County Club where Walter Rankin had his huge deal every year.

JACKSON: Who was Walter Rankin?

McCAIN: He was the constable before Jack Abercia[44].

JACKSON: Okay.

McCAIN: He just started out, it was the going thing, and thousands of people would show up there. You better show up. Sometimes certain governors have flown in a

[44] Jack R. Abercia, Harris County Constable, Precinct 1, 1991 - present

helicopter and landed out there at the golf course and just come in and make a showing. That was the thing to make a showing.

There is another place called Dance Town U.S.A. What I mentioned in these few, that's the ones that I am more familiar with, there were other places around the county, but Dance Town U.S.A. was out on Airline, it was a huge dance place, a ball room. The building is still there, I don't think they use it for anything else, but anyway, you would book that and have your barbeque catered and you would come into the building in the front door and check in and then you would go back through a long building through a clearing back to the back where you would go out and get your barbeque and come back.

So, if it was Squatty's deal, he would have me sitting on a stool right there at the door as they came in. We were all shaking hands and seeing everybody that came in. He made his point that he was going to do that. Also, if we were at somebody else's function, we would make it a point to go get a plate of food, bring it back and put it on a table where everybody coming in walked down this line had to walk right by it. Squatty would sit on this side and I would sit with my back to them as they were coming up. He would get to say hello to everybody and this was at other peoples functions and not his own. But he made a lot of headway doing that. When they would go down and get their food, then coming back there was always some of them that would want to stop and say something more to him. I used to marvel at him, he was a pretty good politician. He was a darn good politician. He tried to stay with the tempo of the people.

Now, there is one other thing, he drank Jack Daniel's and there was always some in the trunk of the car. But when we were at a function like that, I would have the keys to his car and go get some water and ice and put some Jack Daniel's in there. It looked like a coke that he was drinking, he made it look just about like a coke color and he would sit there, he didn't drink a whole lot, but he always had a drink, just sip, one drink would last an hour or so. Then all of a sudden he would holler, "Hey Mac, get me another coke," or "I'm out."

I remember a lot of times, see he didn't have any qualms about me having the keys then to the trunk or to his car, but a lot of times I would run into his office and I would say, "Hey, give me the keys to your car," when he was parked down in the basement, particularly this building [Administration Building]. He would start getting them then all of a sudden he would stop and say, "No, you ain't going to get the keys to what's in my trunk." It was strange, it was all right one time and then not all right another. I do, I think I told you this story before, he bought liquor for all of the news media, had a bottle for all of them. He tried to get their favorite, whatever they liked. But anyway, he bought a lot of Jack Daniel's, of course nobody turned him down on that, but it was strange. Bill Bailey was a reporter back then, years ago, when Bill Bailey[45] became constable, he came by Squatty's office and says, "Well, where is my bottle?" Squatty said, "Hell no, I ain't giving you a bottle, not now."

JACKSON: Well, one thing that we have touched on before, and that is the fact that there were certain gathering places, certain ice houses in town and restaurants, spaghetti dinners, and that kind of thing. If you could just touch on those gathering places.

[45] Bill Bailey, Harris County Constable, Precinct 8, 1982 - present

McCAIN: One was that was on every Thursday you'd have most of your politicians make it a point to go to Sacred Heart on Whitney where they serve meatballs and spaghetti. It was a sacred organization. A lot of Italians were running it, but it was a charity deal and there was a lot rich men that were well off back there cooking, working in that kitchen and serving that food up. You'd have to know them, but sometimes somebody in that line might think that they were nobody and want to talk to them. I had one woman tell me that this guy that was working the bar and he was a millionaire and we were having another function there one night and she came over and told me, "You better go just do something about him, he is giving poor service and he is not giving the right change." I said, "No, I ain't going to do anything, you go talk to him if you want to, but I ain't talking to him." The old man, he was good, but he was getting real old.

That Sacred Heart, Mr. Joe Montalbono, who had the big lumber companies around here, he was the president for a long time. There was a volcano in Italy and it destroyed an orphanage and they took their money, got their monies together, they sent him, gave him the money and he went to Italy and saw that it was rebuilt. He said they didn't trust those Italians over there, they weren't going to send the money, he was going to go over there to make sure where it went and that they got what they paid for. So he stayed over there for a good while while it was being built. They financed the whole thing, materials and all. But that is just how good they were. They were a wonderful organization. But you never did hear that much about them.

JACKSON: Why is it that the politicians started going there? It wasn't just for spaghetti.

McCAIN: Because on Thursday, all they had was spaghetti, you better be there at 11:00, that is when the serving started and there used to be a line up about to 50 people there and there would be a line there until 1:00. But the way it was laid out, certain tables, different ones, Squatty, a lot of us had different tables. Joe Resweber[46], who was the County Attorney back then, there was a table he had, it wasn't that he had it or any of them had it, you just understood it. If an outsider made the mistake of sitting there, something would happen, he would be harassed a little bit where he moved because they wanted their private conversations. There were just so many politicians meeting there.

Now many years ago Squatty and Joe Resweber, mainly Joe Resweber at first and a good friend of mine Luke Griscom, he's dead now, he worked for Joe Resweber, but we would go out and buy wine and carry it there and we started the deal of free wine which is still going on now. Sometimes we would run out of wine and I would have to run up and down the street and buy just any kind I could find at any price and all that and get it back there because the ones coming in would have been mad not getting their wine. So later Squatty and Mr. Resweber talked to Mr. Montalbano and he said, "Joe, why don't you put the cooler in here and you just buy it and keep it in here for us and we will buy it from you." That was a good idea. So after that he would stock that wine and then we'd just pay for what we used. It was always cool and all. You had to have an in to get that last day before election for serving, so you would start ahead of time and let Mr. Joe's co-workers know you wanted that day and particularly Blue. I could usually get that day because we were

[46] Joe Resweber, Harris County Attorney, 1957 - 1980

pretty well known there at that time and that group. It was our politicians that we were pushing for, like Carl Smith and different ones. Anyway, Squatty was always easy to get that date for us, of course they knew he was going to get that and Mr. Resweber, but if they were on the same time they might flip flop.

JACKSON: So, what do you mean by getting the dates.

McCAIN: That one date on Thursday for serving free wine.

JACKSON: Oh, so it would be wine, compliments of Squatty Lyons.

McCAIN: Or Joe Resweber. Other politicians would fall in line back then, but we didn't have to ever, I can't remember us ever paying up front. One time one politician a few years later wasn't going to pay and that was like not paying the Mafia. He got his money together but he didn't get any wine put out there. They started it then where you had to make a sizable deposit if you weren't that well known, you just couldn't walk in there and get a date or nothing. That was the going thing in politics like that, the working people and all. That would usually last four to six weeks, maybe six or longer, every Thursday. Every Thursday you would see everybody going out there to get their wine and the spaghetti.

Joe Resweber, an interesting politician, he was a Fire Commissioner for the City of Houston at one time and he left to go in the service, I think he was in the Seabees. When he came back he walked in and there was Frank Mann[47], he was a city councilman who had appointed Joe Resweber, and so anyway, this was all a tight click and so Joe went in there, in his old office, and was Mann sitting there running on his job. He says, "Well have a seat, one of these days we will look around and see

[47] Frank Mann, Houston Fire Commissioner, 1938 – 1942; Houston City Council, 1959 - 1979

if we can't find somewhere to put you." Joe told him, "No, it ain't like that, you are in my seat now, so get your butt out of there."

Anyway, Joe Resweber was running for office for council and then running for county attorney and back in the council days you had buses and there were some street cars at the time. Anyway, he had little slivers of paper about so long and so wide and on each side was printed Joe Resweber. So as he was riding he would drop them out and they would just fly around and either way they fell you would see a Joe Resweber. Boy, it was funny back then, we would get together and just talk. All you had to do was just talk a little bit. When he became county attorney, Blue, he wasn't an attorney now, but he was one of the top dogs with Mr. Resweber, one of the rules Mr. Resweber said was, "Blue, I don't want you drinking before noon." But at noon he would have his work done because he had some real good assistants. He'd take off and quite often there was a barbeque place called John's, it was over just off North Main. You would go there and Mr. Resweber, city, county and everybody went to John's for good barbeque. That's the best barbeque that I have ever had. There was a room back at the back that had a huge turntable.

JACKSON: Lazy Susan.

McCAIN: Lazy Susan. The whole table turned. So you would have to crawl over each other to get back there and if you had to go to the restroom or something, then you would have to disrupt everybody to come out. But anyway, they had those sliding doors, they would open that up, take your order, get your beer, waitress would come and sit your beer and order there. You would start turning it, take your order off and all that stuff, but when it was closed there was a lot of good talking going on in there.

Like Johnny Allyan had a roofing company, Allyan Roofing, I think it was off Wood Street, strange I can go there but I can't remember, of course I went there so many times. He was heavy into politics. He had what they called a Crying Towel. Did we talk about the Crying Towel?

JACKSON: No. I don't think so.

McCAIN: Anyway, that was called a Crying Towel. Every so often, you had to be invited there though. But there was corned beef and cabbage, new potatoes and maybe corn and plenty to drink. But he would open that up. It was built there on his property and that was what it was for, the Crying Towel, that was what it was all for. You would just go out there, but if you weren't invited you got the cold shoulder and someway it got to you that you better get your rear out of here.

JACKSON: Didn't you say no women were allowed?

McCAIN: No women went there. Dude Parmley[48], big old wheel, he was the head inspector for the electricians of Elk City. He had his motor home one day and he brought his wife Sue and she was real hoity-toity. Anyway, they were going to go somewhere afterwards. He brought her in the motor home and they started walking in. Johnny Allyan told him, "Come here boy, she can't come in." So she had to go sit in that motor home the whole time Dude was back there. That really made her mad. She used to pop off to me about that kind of stuff like that.

JACKSON: Were women ever allowed there?

[48] M. S. "Dude" Parmley, Lifetime Director, Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo

McCAIN: The only women that was allowed was his wife and her sister. They were working right there anyway, in the office, and they were the only ones. They weren't a nuisance, it was just like they were really one of the crowd.

Over on Shepherd, no it's Yale, there was a joint there, an ice house, and man they would be cooking over there and the girls working there would be cooking and certain days they would have a big cook out and a lot of us would show up just to eat, tip them real good. I don't think we paid a certain price for the meal or anything, but if you are too chintzy you didn't get to go back. That wasn't the only place, but that was the only one circle that I was running in, but there were similar circles.

JACKSON: All around town?

McCAIN: Yeah, all around town and in the county.

JACKSON: I think something that is interesting in this day of drug testing and fear of having more than a beer a night, the amount of liquor. So there was no problem with drinking during working hours if the politicians were serving wine at lunch?

McCAIN: Well, that was your own discretion, just don't get in trouble. But by the same token, I will tell you this, usually as far as drinking was concerned, I would refrain, but if I did start drinking at noon and anytime that I had had one drink, I wouldn't go back to my office because I did not want somebody smelling it on my breath and have a controversy. Somebody would say, "Yeah he had been drinking, he was drunk." That was a hard fast rule for me. I didn't have a problem with it. It didn't pose a problem with me. Because there were a lot of days I didn't even go back to the office though. There used to be a lot of drinking going on and it was just the nature of

beast. You got by by the seat of your pants, but we could no more do that now days than anything.

We used to have parties out on Gessner at Squatty's camp. He would have one, I think it was every February, every budget year you would redo your deputization of your employees. He'd have a big party out there and invite all kinds of people. But if you were invited and didn't go, it was ironic, you know, he would let you know later or someone would let him know that they did not come out there that day. They spotted and knew a lot of that stuff.

JACKSON: So it was a command performance? You showed up.

McCAIN: Yeah. But finally they had to stop that now because of everybody was scared of somebody having an accident driving away from there.

JACKSON: So, he was serving liquor at this party.

McCAIN: Yeah. Herman Leacher was an old man who could hardly see. He always volunteered for tending bar there. Anyway, when I would step up there I would say, "Let me have some Jack and water." He would say, "Is that you Mac?" It was mostly Jack Daniel's and no water. Boy, he really liked me, he really took care of me. He was a good old Czech guy. He went to the SPJST, he and his wife every weekend. They belonged over there and probably went a lot more than that. They went to the dances over there. I used to go over there quite a bit. There was a band later from Iowa called Eddie Skeets. They would come down here for the winter. They would go down to the Valley and come back through here a few times. Sometimes they would take off and just travel with that band around the county. They liked them. They were good Czechs.

JACKSON: Let me ask you one more question and then we are going to close for the day. You were a union member.

McCAIN: Yeah.

JACKSON: You were active in your union.

McCAIN: Yeah. That was the railroad union.

JACKSON: Right.

McCAIN: But then the union here, I was in it too even when I was Building Superintendent, when I was in charge. I kept my union dues paid up. Richard Timmons was the union rep. Now he did a lot of good on stuff that really mattered, but a lot of these complaints against me from some employees would be really frivolous, but they would want to threaten me, "Well, I'll go to the union!" and I would say, "I hope you do." Then they would want to talk to me a little bit later. I would say, "Don't say another word to me; just go get your union rep."

JACKSON: So the employees were union? The county employees?

McCAIN: Yeah, some of them at that time belong to the union.

JACKSON: Which union was that?

McCAIN: AFSCME, or what … not all of them now, but it was a lot of them that did and they never did get a strong hold here. It was an office building, cleaning, public service workers or something like that.

JACKSON: Were they part of the AFL or Teamsters.

McCAIN: AFL.

JACKSON: They were AFL?

McCAIN: Yeah, but I'd force the issue and make them so mad. They would have to go get their union rep after they opened their mouth because I wouldn't deal with them any more. Richard Timmons would get in there. Usually what I was offering, he knew it was fair and felt it was and finally he would just tell these guys. He and I would talk just like we were at each others throat. Then we would go out and drink together in the evening and stuff like that. But anyway, he would finally talk straight to them and he had pretty good boys and make them understand, "Look, you got it better here than you are going to have it any other place now." It would straighten them out.

For so many years I had Henry Standiford, my assistant, and Willie Toran[49]. Henry Standiford was my assistant and Willie was right there with him though. I more or less left it up to Willie on making decisions on some of the people we hired. I'll tell you this much, because sometimes when they would put a reference down it would be because I told them to be sure and tell me how good that person was, put it down. But Willie also knew that that source wasn't going to prove, we had trouble with some of those county employees before from that person. So we took it. But anyway, sometimes in having some problems with employees though, disgruntled and all, they'd come in. Willie would have to come in with them, I wouldn't talk with them unless Willie was there. This was beside the union deal. But this was just disgruntled employees. One was telling me, crying that he was having to work too hard and all and I said, "Wait a minute," I turned around to Willie and I said, "Mr. Toran, are you working him over eight hours a day?" He said, "No sir." I said, "Well how many hours are you paying him for?" He said, "Eight." I looked back at the

[49] Willie Toran, Building Services, Facilities and Property Management, 1978 - present

man and I said, "Now are they working you over or what now?" He said, "Well, no sir, but I am just working too hard." I said, "Well, we are paying you for it. We get a days work for a days pay." He'd have to scoot out of there.

Willie would know when I would go on a tirade, sometimes I would just forget the man, the person or moment sitting there, and I would just be chewing, one time I looked at Willie and I said, "Hey, this name sounds familiar, didn't I tell you to fire him two weeks ago?" Willie knew what to say, "Yes sir." I said, "Well get around to it." Well, then he would start pleading for the guy and say, "Well, I thought that maybe I would try to give him another chance," or something like that. I would say, "Well I tell you what, I am through with him myself. I told you to fire him and you didn't do it, but it's up to you now. If he stays and if he messes up I am going to fire you." I got their attention a lot of time with junk like that. It was just acting, play. We would put on a show and just laugh about it later. It was quite interesting.

JACKSON: I wonder how many stories go around about you by people who did not know you were play acting at the time, that you and Willie were messing with them?

McCAIN: I never did consider myself as tough as some of the stories I sometimes hear. But I know Judge Solito[50] was an administrative judge, I am going to tell you this one while I am thinking it. His wife's name was Sally. Judge Solito was a dear friend of mine, but he's dead now. Anyway, I got a call from his wife, Judge Solito was off on a conference somewhere, going to be gone a week or two weeks, but all of a sudden I

[50] Peter Solito, Judge, Court of Domestic Relations, 1967 – 1971; Criminal District Court #209, 1971 – 1977; Civil District Court #164, 1977 – 1992.

had this call and it was Sally. She told me where she was and she was in his courtroom in his office. She said, "Mr. McCain, what account do I charge this stuff that I buy for this office?" I said, "What? He ain't got no such thing." She started in ranting and raring about the furnishing there. She didn't like them and all that and so anyway she said, "I want to redecorate this whole thing." I said, "Well you better have the money if you want to do it now." Anyway, when the judge got back he called me and said, "Mac, when Sally told me she called you and asked you that, I was so scared." I said, "What did she say?" But anyway, she was so worried about the coffee tables and all and we had a judge that had bought some atrocious stuff. He could get by with it with ordering and purchasing because he would buy one piece at a time and it would cost about a $1,000 to $1,500 a piece -- driftwood style and glass top and end tables. He got that and I nearly flipped.

End Tape 4 Side A

Start Tape 4 Side B

McCAIN: He was an appellate court judge and he was elected to the Court of Appeals. He was going to take that furniture with him. I put my foot down. I said, "No, it is assigned to District Courts." I said, "It stays right here." He said, "Well, there ain't nobody else that is going to want it." I said, "But I do." Anyway, I wouldn't let him take it and he was having to office in the old bank building.

Anyway, getting back to Sally, when she was hollering she needed that stuff, I had Willie get the crew together on the weekend and went in there, that furniture was in storage, we moved every bit of it into Judge Solito's private office. He called me and said, "What in the hell is this?" I said, "Well, your wife wanted some new

furniture in there and I am taking care of it." Boy, he was mad. Finally, when I told him a little bit later that I would come move it out he said, "No Mac, just leave it there." He said, "You know Sally really likes it." But anyway, he didn't like it at all.

There are a lot of judges that when I would call and I would call not knowing they were on the bench, but it was quite often when they were on the bench the clerk or whoever answered the phone would know, I would tell them my name and say, "Just ask him to call me." They would say, "Wait a minute, he's on the bench but I know that he wants to talk to you." So they would be whispering in court, everybody doing their talking and the case going on. Solito was bad about that, "Y'all go on, I'm listening," and I would be talking to him. Most of the stuff he did not care about hearing it anyway.

The most interesting thing that I thought he did was that he called me to his court one day. He said, "Mac, I really need you to come over here and come in the back door by my bench." I said, "Okay." I went in there and went down the hallway and went in the back door. Now these type of friendships you knew when they were talking like that it was something. He said, "Look here Mac, see these piss ants crawling all over the bench?" He said, "A while ago I kept killing them and I looked up and everybody out there was looking at me wondering what was I doing." He said, "You know, it does look a little funny." I said, "That will be taken care of tonight."

JACKSON: How influential was the labor movement in Democratic politics?

McCAIN: The labor movement was very influential in Democratic politics. Richard Timmons is representing these municipal employees. He was doing a good job on

getting memberships. I wouldn't allow any of them soliciting on county time, our employees. But I'd do this. I would tell him ahead of time, now I am going to set up a safety meeting for twenty or thirty minutes ahead of their meal period and usually meal period is about thirty minutes. I said, "You can come on down there and you can make your little presentation." Really I didn't mind them belonging to the union because it was better for me if they did because all we wanted to do was get the job done. So he would come in and he would get memberships that way. But he would never infringe on it. But the guy that took his place, I can see his face but I can't remember his name right now, he was going in the courthouses and stopping them from their work and trying to sign them up. So I barred him from the building. He didn't want to play it my way, well he just messed himself up. He would go in there at odd ball times.

JACKSON: Well that's crazy, you were a union guy.

McCAIN: Yeah. So we just stopped that and that is why some of the old timers belonged to the union. You will find a lot of the commissioners and judges, they were union people, they were in favor. Judge Elliott, the county judge, later became a district court judge in divorce courts and his father was the local union rep for the Pipefitters Union. They had a big school where the union would teach people out on old Galveston road, teaching them that trade. Judge Elliott had gone through there and he had done pipefitting and all. He carried a card. It was really good for those guys politically and they could say I got a card for this union. That was the going thing back then, being a Democrat and having a card, belonging to the union.

JACKSON: So you didn't see a lot of animosity against the unions. I mean there was. There were bad strikes and stuff after the war.

McCAIN: Yeah, but there was not that kind of mess going on here because it was so closely knit that it could have been handled, if they wanted a strike that was just tough. But I tell you that none of them in Harris County, traditionally the janitors made more working for the county than they could at another building or outside. Squatty, over the years, they were very helpful, they wanted to give a 10 or 20% raise or they would give a $50 across the board to everybody raise. Red capped their house salaries going up. I don't know what they are making now, but back before I left they were making about $1,400 to $1,500 a month. When you contract out they were not getting by with less personnel than I needed for the job, they were eliminating the fringe benefits, vacation, sick time, hospitalization, all that stuff, so they saved on that. That is why they could bid on it. But I fought for them to try to keep them. But a lot of times it was hard to make them understand, I'd tell them, "Why don't you go out to the Gulf Building and see what they are paying janitors down there?" If they'd do it and listen to me, they would come back happy with what they had.

JACKSON: This is Sarah Canby Jackson and I am speaking with Mac McCain on July 20, 2005. Today we are going to discuss various politicians and personalities in county Government that Mac has known over the years. Mac, let me just throw out some names to you and then if you could comment about them, what kind of politicians they were, how they got into power, how you were able to work with them, what you thought of them and any other bits of information you would like to include. First of all let's start with V. V. Ramsey who was a county commissioner.

McCAIN: Okay. V. V. Ramsey was a county commissioner in Precinct 2. He was quite colorful, but I can't remember some of the stories, it is hard to remember different stories about him. He was always in a hurry and he would run by you and give you an order, this and that should be done. As a matter of fact, when we bought the old Pasadena Bank building, there was a sign outside directing traffic for the drive through and we were preparing to take it down. Of course, it served us no purpose, but it was neon and all, sometimes flashing. He came by one day and said, "Don't take that sign down, I want my name up there." Anyway I told Commissioner Lyons and he says, "You are going to take it down, we are not going to have his name up there flashing." That was V. V. wanting it like that. So we wound up taking it down.

Anyway, V. V., like I say, he was a good ole person, good guy in my opinion and he was always in a hurry doing different things, but he did a lot of different things, but where he got in trouble was over the voting machines and supposedly a kick back, and I have personally never have realized how they could have convicted him of that, but they did. In my opinion I never did believe he was guilty of it. But maybe that is just my faith in an old friend. I always felt that maybe there were others involved that probably set him up because he was the commissioner that was liaison to the voting machine department. Back then you would have different commissioners that would be liaisons, just like Squatty had the buildings for so many years, but he was the custodian of buildings and he had the say. Each one of them had their little bailiwicks like that, that they really had the say over. But even though he was head of it, he had jurisdiction over it to some degree, but he didn't micromanage the daily working. So somewhere down the line he got blamed for

something that went on. I feel he did and I never have felt he was guilty of that. Anyway, I don't know if it was because of that or not but his son, Mike, went on to become a real famous lawyer here, but he at one time after it was going along a while, I think he was helping to represent his father. I know he represented his father to a degree. There are other things but I can't remember them right now.

JACKSON: What about Kyle Chapman? You have mentioned him before. He was your good friend that got you your original job.

McCAIN: Yeah, Kyle Chapman was like I said a very dear friend and he really understood people pretty well, real well in situations. He was, I don't know, he moved in the community and in the precinct and he had a lot of friends and he was able to get things done real good. Me being there, that building that I was at, the annex, was the first one built and it was in Commissioner Chapman's precinct and like I told you before Squatty was over them because he was over all the buildings. I paid pretty much attention to Chapman, but Squatty and Chapman were real good buddies, so what ever one said, they were going to back each other up.

I had a superintendent at that time and Mr. Chapman told me that he had somebody to look at the outside appearances of that building, that we needed some shrubbery around it. He told me that we would just get this landscape guy out there and let him tell you what you need. He said, "Just get it ordered. They will put it in and all that stuff." So he drew me up a diagram, gave me an order, my boss at that time said, "No, time out, don't do anything about it." Then he gave me the run around, "Well, my boy", his name was Hopping. He told me, "No, they won't just do anything about it." It was always that mythical 'they,' 'they won't let'. So Chapman

asked me one day, "Why don't you get that done?" I said, "Well, my boss said that Mr. Hopping said that ya'll wouldn't let him do it, that he just couldn't get it done." He said, "Okay." He made a phone call later and the secretary for Mr. Hopping called me and she said, "Mac, we have lost that order you turned in, run it down just what was on that." I told her, "Say five of one type of a bush and maybe four or three of another or ten of one." She wrote that down and they ordered the stuff though and it was increased about by five or six times. They came out there and delivered that stuff and the first one I called, I called Mr. Chapman and I told him what had happened. I said, "This is going to be hard to straighten out." Because when you had to send something in, you got so much paperwork and then all that, and getting it squared away in county on why you ordered this. Anyway, he said, "Just shut your mouth, just shut your mouth you fool, I will take care of it." After that a precinct truck showed up and they start loading up the excess and he took it and used it in his parks and different places. We just signed off on the whole amount.

I don't know if I told you this or not, at one time there was a friend of his working for Carl Smith out there at the tax office and he had his secretary downtown, but a lot of time I would be moving around and carrying stuff back and forth or I would run errands for the lady out there. She wanted me to do something one day and I was on a very small salary at that time. I told her, "I'm running short on gas." She says, "Well, doesn't the county pay for your gas?" I said, "No, I'm not on a car allowance." She told Mr. Chapman. Mr. Chapman went in and Mr. S. B. Bruce[51], that is when they used to have budget hearings over in his office in the old Criminal

[51] Samuel B. Bruce, Harris County Auditor, 1955 - 1968

Courts Building in his conference room. Bruce told me this, that Chapman threw that out on the table and he wanted a car allowance for McCain. So the argument became not whether I got the car allowance, it was between Chapman and Squatty about whose boy I was. That it should be Squatty if it was going to be asked for. Chapman told him, "Well by God you never did do it." Mr. Bruce told me how the arguing went on and I was going to get the car allowance anyway.

JACKSON: So, whose boy were you? Did they ever decide that?

McCAIN: No. They just argued like that all the time. Kyle Chapman started the Kyle Chapman Baseball Little League. Somebody is still sponsoring them now, because there is still a Kyle Chapman Baseball Little League. They went to a lot of playoff tournaments and won a lot of trophies. Like I say, he was the one that started that and sponsored them. He really believed in that and he was putting in ball fields. All of them were interested in ball, so they were putting in their ball fields.

Let's see, Armand's Bayou was in Mr. Chapman's precinct. That area was in his precinct at that time. He was instrumental in getting that from Exxon. I think Exxon donated a good bit of it and then the county may have purchased part of it, but it was an arrangement that the county could afford back then. It's still in its natural state as far as I know. They have a tour boat that goes in there now, but they are preserving that pretty well.

JACKSON: Was he defeated for reelection?

McCAIN: Yes, he was defeated by Tom Bass. Tom Bass was really a scholar, teacher and professor. Tom Bass was real sharp. When Tom Bass got in office he depended on his top aides. He would go to court and get something passed, but otherwise

micromanagement of it, he didn't get involved in that because he had his other teaching problems. He did care, but he just wasn't up that front and noticeable on that. He was a go getter. When Tom Bass was running against Chapman, I may have told you this before, he had an attaché case that had a bumper sticker on each side, "Tom Bass." So no matter which was it was turned, it was "Tom Bass." So when they would get up to speak, he would sit there right up front and boy Chapman got mad one day, got up and just slapped it down.

JACKSON: Why do you think that he was able to defeat Chapman who was a long time county commissioner?

McCAIN: Oh, I really don't understand it, but you are going to find that the makeup of the community and change in the community, that's probably why. Because Tom Bass was instrumental in getting Precinct 1, and that was one of his projects was for the minorities and he was for the minorities and Chapman was depending mostly on the other affluent people. There was a lot of minorities in that precinct. Tom Bass's mission to get on the court was to eventually get the lines changed to give the minority definite advantage on being elected there. Because up until then there was only white commissioners. After he got it changed over and Commissioner Lee ran for that job. Of course Commissioner Lee had to defeat a good number of opponents there that were influential at that time, they were minorities, but they were influential. He just wanted it changed and that was just his nature and he was also a professor at St. Thomas. He taught Government and all. I think that's the reason. Chapman has so many supporters, everybody just said, "Well he's going to win anyway." I even thought that. I was very disappointed when he lost.

But later in a short period of time Commissioner Bass and I became friends, we were never real up close friends, but we had respect for each other, and I considered us friends. On his staff he had a woman that was his general superintendent and her name was Nancy Gehman. She was quite a deal, she was something else. Then he had a guy named Russell Rowell that handled other stuff around. He was administrative. They both were, but Nancy had what a male superintendent would be doing, she had all that. Russell Rowell was really like a second commissioner. He pretty well could speak for Bass. In other words, if he said it you pretty well could bet that Bass was going along with it.

It was interesting to work with Russell Rowell, but what was interesting was the way I was handling my budgets back then. Russell told me "Mac, when it comes to your budget none of us can understand it." That's why we just referred to Raycraft, you and him. Between us, not down on Raycraft, but he didn't understand what all I was doing either. I always felt that there was a little animosity there. Raycraft made a remark one time and said, "If Mac's got it on the agenda you can bet it's going, because he takes care of each one of them, he plays his politics and is taking care of each one of them in a similar matter, whatever he's got, he's got something else for each one of the others, so he's going to get his vote." Just stuff like that. For a long time Raycraft was interested in picking my brain and he told me one time and said, "You ought to write everything down on paper in case something happens to you." I thought, uh uh buddy, all you want is guidelines. But he has definitely a good guideline now and perhaps the way I did it back then wasn't exactly right because sometimes something would come up during the year. But I would get

my vote and put it on the agenda, not like it is now where you have to go through him first, but I would put it on the agenda and ask him to get the money and he would find the money. That would irritate a little, but I did it my way.

JACKSON: So Tom Bass, once he got the precinct change, then he didn't run for reelection.

McCAIN: He didn't run for reelection. I don't remember exactly how soon it was after changing, but I think that it was pretty soon that he did not run for reelection. That gave the minority a change.

JACKSON: That's when Commissioner Lee came in?

McCAIN: Yes.

JACKSON: Speaking of people who follow other people, what about Jamie Bray? He came in after Ramsey.

McCAIN: Jamie Bray and the County Judge, Bill Elliott, were wanting to get control of the court. Jamie Bray ran against, I don't know if Ramsey already had left office or not or what had happened, but he ran for that job. It was definitely to get rid of Ramsey. He was waiting for the wounded soldier. He, Judge Elliott, they had a lot of money in their war chest and he was elected. Judge Elliott had such a hold over the court at that time that he was the ruler of the court. Squatty's power had diminished. Judge Elliott became so powerful at that time that he actually defeated himself because all of a sudden, you can run with that power and step on too many toes. You become like a little dictator and all of a sudden you've gone too far. That's the same way in politics now, sometimes when they've gone too far and stepped on people's toes they'll get shot down. If they just go along, usually you can stay in office pretty much by knowing what you are supposed to do, that's why Squatty, part of his job

was knowing that he had to stay close to the people. So he was always close to the people and he kept up with what he was supposed to be doing, road and bridge, that's keeping those roads in real good shape and he did. At one time Judge Elliott thought that the dome stadium should be named after him and stuff like that, but it wasn't. Anyway you get big heads like that. I'd have friends come along and for some reason or the other I felt that I had enough votes. I never had any problem with the court because I was always a court member's boy and trying to do just about what they wanted.

I am going to digress some minutes. You haven't asked me about this, but when we obtained the old District Attorneys Building from the federal Government, that was an old post office and a federal building, it was surplus and we put it out and we were able to buy it. Carol Vance[52] and a man named Larkin working for Carol Vance, an attorney, but they were instrumental and they took care of getting the grant funds from the Government to buy that building, from the federal Government for us to in turn buy it from them. Then they wound up getting over a million dollars to renovate it. It took a midnight dash with all their paperwork to Austin to turn that in and they got there just before the deadline, I think that night, and turned all the work in. That was quite a feat for them to accomplish that. A lot of people didn't really realize how we got that.

And they worked it out, them and the court, where we were able to get grant funds to buy it, grant funds to renovate it except I remember distinctly someway out of my budget I had to put up $280,000 toward the renovation and it was supposed to

[52] Carol Vance, Harris County District Attorney, 1966 - 1979

be matching. So over the years I would look at that balance in my account and the $280,000 was still there, even after it was completed. Finally, I called the Auditor's Office and I said, "On that matching funds, my assumption was that if they spent a dollar here I was supposed to spend ten, fifteen, twenty cents out of here and keep it even." They said, "No, it all came in under, your money wasn't needed." I said, "Good, I can use that for somebody else then." Part of my deal was playing my politics like that to dole it out to whoever was our friend.

My budget, I pretty well had it, even when I had revenue sharing, to where we would get maybe fifteen million. It would be certain revenue sharing that went to certain spots though, like the hospital district or different places. But some of it came over our way for the buildings, then I'd convince the court to go ahead and stick that in the Building Superintendent's pot, but you all have always got control of the money. We would put that in there and then shortly after that, after it was agreed to put it there, then I would write me a letter to the court defining the project that it was going to be used for and some of those projects have not been done today. Because as we went along and needed something else done, I would write a letter to the court that although the money was set aside for that, I could let that go if we needed this other project worse than that at the time. I always felt some of my stuff teed Raycraft off but I don't want to dwell too much on him because he was a good man and he has kept our bond ratings up high. His method is better than my shooting from the hip method. I had to play my game if I was going to run the buildings. The court members had it so engrained in me that you are the head dog, we are looking for you

twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, no matter what happens. It is like that story they would tell me, "The tail doesn't wag the dog."

I am getting too far off about Carol Vance, but another thing on Carol Vance, he was so instrumental in that though and at that time I didn't particularly like naming buildings, I figured they were all Harris County buildings of some sort, after any one, but Carol really wanted that building named after him. He was telling me, "It needs to be named after somebody, and maybe me, attorneys or something, in the legal field." I says, "You know what?" this really irritated him, I said, "We'll just name it the Legal Aid Building." I said, "Even though you are District Attorney, y'all are supposed to help furnish aide to both sides and try to help and resolve." Boy that made him mad. Finally we talked along and finally we wound up naming it the District Attorney's Building. Carol Vance was a real good man, he was sort of pompous though. I knew that he wanted that building named after him real bad and I didn't like it and we settled on District Attorney's Building.

JACKSON: Well, we don't have many buildings in Harris County that are named after people.

McCAIN: Very few, you have got the Mickey Leland Annex,

JACKSON: You have the Kyle Chapman.

McCAIN: No, Mickey Leland out on Shepherd and Kyle Chapman out there.

JACKSON: Right.

McCAIN: If I can remember that is about the only buildings we have named after individuals. Really, even though they were both good friends of mine, I didn't like the idea of breaking the chain and having buildings named after different persons.

Because if you name, I don't know, it was better a park or something else. It is just like Judge Love[53] wanted the new Criminal Court's Building named after Judge Love. Judge Love is a close and dear friend of mine, but I never was fool-hardy. I told him, "I can't believe that we would have that named the Love Justice Center."

JACKSON: So, Jamie Bray besides his time on court.

McCAIN: He was there one time, one term and Commissioner Fonteno, but it was Chapman who still had a war chest. Chapman put his money back for Commissioner Fonteno and also at that time when Elliott and Jamie Bray were more or less their enemies, by theirs I mean Squatty's, Chapman and all. Commissioner Chapman was helping Lindsay financially and supporting Lindsay real well as the County Judge. So they both won. There had been a two-year period where Squatty did not have the buildings, and after the clique went back into office so to speak, Squatty nominated me for the Building Superintendent job. It was slated that I should have gotten it about two years prior to that and in the meantime, in that two year period, there was a good man from Judge Elliott's office by the name of Egg Miller, he became superintendent, but he was just a figure head, but he was a good man. When I went in office, Squatty was back over the buildings and he told me "I don't care about Egg, we don't have an argument about Egg, but I have decided to go ahead and ask Egg to leave." Egg was like an assistant, he could have taken anything, but I thought there would be a conflict having both of us and me coming in and him staying. I wanted to run it myself. But as usual, we talked to Carl Smith and he put Egg on his payroll and Egg retired from that job. It didn't really hurt him like that.

[53] Miron A. Love, Judge, Criminal District Court #177, 1958 - 1995

JACKSON: Now we get down to, of course, your dear friend Squatty Lyons who we've discussed and who always comes up in the interview. I would like you to just really see if you can comment on him. We have talked about his elections. We have talked about the way he ran the buildings, but he had a unique personality so that anyone who was alive while he was commissioner and lived in Harris County knows who Squatty Lyons is. I don't think that would be true if you said Kyle Chapman or V. V. Ramsey. So how was Squatty different?

McCAIN: Squatty in his difference though, he didn't care, he didn't try to pacify anybody by agreeing with them. He let the chips fall where they may. He didn't try to whitewash anything to make it look good. He told it like it was. If he told you he was going to do something, he got it done. This happened a lot of times. He would tell people, "I'm not going to do this." They would be a mad constituent for a while, but somewhere they would wind up liking him. He didn't mind just telling different ones, "I am not going to do it."

End of Tape 4 – Side B

Start of Tape 5 – Side A

McCAIN: Squatty and Fern would ride the roads, they would be looking and checking the precinct out. A lot of people knew him like that. He was close to the people. When he would go back he would call his superintendent and say, "Hey, so and so a place, that road is too rough or something." They would get on it and take care of it right away. But not only the roads, there's other things like cutting the grass in the ditches that belonged to Precinct 4, he kept that in good shape, mowed and all. If you were driving along and you would see a spot where it was well maintained and all of a

sudden no maintenance at all, that would either be another precinct, you would know you had changed into another precinct or you had come into the city limits. Back in those days it was drastic, the city's grass would be up two or three feet high and his nicely mowed right up to that line.

Squatty was out, he partied a lot on all kind of occasions. He went to different things and he was invited to a lot of functions, receptions and all. A lot of times I would be around and he would say, "Come on, go with us, him and Fern." I would say, "No, I don't have an invitation." He would say, "Devil with it, come on." We would start walking through and somebody would want to start checking me and he would look at them and say, "Hey, he's with me." Nobody would say a word and we would walk right on in. A lot of elaborate functions I would get to attend like that. He'd just walk by them and boy when he said it was someway that whoever was at that door understood. I was never questioned and he did the answering for me. Later, I would get invitations myself but not all functions though. I went just because he wanted me along just as a friend I felt, just to have somebody to shoot the bull a little bit and if somebody got to pressuring him too hard he would let them know, but then he might turn around and just walk off from them. I felt that maybe I was there to help cushion some and Fern help cushion some of that. We had a darn good relationship and I learned a lot from him.

It's just like his crew in the camps and all, at that time they'd be taking comp time or working weekends putting up signs. Squatty liked me because I worked at headquarters with Fern. She was real temperamental. Sometimes she would get a little mad and be fussing at me about something. I would just look at my watch and I

would say, "Oh, I got a meeting down at the courthouse," and just walk out. Some of them commented to him about, "Why isn't Mac out here helping us put signs?" He would just say, "If any one of you think you can do what he does, then go down there and try to do it, because you won't last." He said, "You can put up signs better than you can do what Mac is doing."

It's just hard to explain, over the years, just like if he had excess tickets, ball tickets and all, he was always giving them to me. It's hard for me to explain so that you will understand, but he was out there with the people. No matter where he went. He would get out of his car and people would know him. He showed up all the time at places like South Main. It had the ballroom right there, he was out there, him and Fern and Ug Williams was Chief Deputy and Buster Kern, they were all good buddies, they would be out there, they ran together, they would be out there drinking and partying and having a big time. Then, the next day they would be up and at 'em again. On Sunday he would get out and start moving around.

I may have told you this. Squatty would ride with Ug Williams sometimes when him and the deputies were out on something. So Ug got this black guy and put him in the back seat with Squatty and about that time he asked this guy, "Now what did you say your name was?" The guy said, "Lyons." He said, "Oh, you are kin to that guy there?" Squatty got so mad about that it was pitiful. The guy said, "No sir." But anyway, Ug pulled all kinds of stuff like that.

JACKSON: It is hard to just encapsulate him because he was this huge personality.

McCAIN: Yeah.

JACKSON: I think one thing that may be true too is that physically he was unique. He was squat, he was short, he was broad and I assume that you wouldn't mistake him for anyone else; he didn't blend into the crowd. He was easily recognizable.

McCAIN: He sure was.

JACKSON: He also had a reputation for integrity.

McCAIN: He did, he had a lot of integrity. I'll tell you if I bought something to take up for him, he made sure he paid me exactly to the penny. I would say, "Oh, let that go," the change, he would say "No," he owed me. If it were forty-one cents or something like that, say $10.41, he made sure that I got right down to the penny. Some of that time, you know change, you don't want to necessarily fool with it, but he had a lot of integrity. Seemed like he always reasoned stuff out real fast in his mind and pretty well knew what was right and wrong. But if you were trying to do something or tell him something wrong, he would cut you off in a hurry and straighten you out.

JACKSON: Do you want to talk about his final election? You want to talk about when Eleanor Tinsley[54] announced when he was still in the hospital or something like that?

McCAIN: Yeah, she announced that she was going to run.

JACKSON: Squatty had been ill?

McCAIN: He was laying in the hospital and she announced she was going to run for that post. That pretty well irritated the family real bad. Sometimes things like that would happen and he would turn against somebody if he thought that they were trying to do something to him. Just like some of the court members, he would get crossways with them. The joke around the county, wasn't really any joke, was because Precinct 4

[54] Eleanor Tinsley, Houston City Council, 1980 - 1990

was redistricted so much it started out I-10 and south of there and came around, came around, came around, come on around. Finally it got all the way over to past Humble. At one time that was Precinct 2. It was said that that was how they got all their roads repaired. Just redistrict it. Ten years and he repairs all the roads in that precinct. It was pretty much that. They were trying to find some way to get his authority and to get rid of him.

At one time him and Commissioner Bob Eckels were pretty good buddies. All of a sudden some of the things that supposedly Bob Eckels did later, Squatty and him had a falling out and they got real mad. I remember one time, and Eckels sort of picked on Squatty, he knew his soft points where he could get to him and would aggravate him. Squatty was trying to light either a cigar or his pipe one day in his office and Eckels said, "Oh, let me do that for you," and he took his package of matches and struck one. Squatty took them out of his hand and threw them across the room. "I don't need anything from you." Just such foolishness as that.

It was funny, when you got through in the back door, I could roam the halls back then easy, you can't now, but I wandered the whole back rooms shooting the bull and all and that when Raycraft said I usually had my votes lined up. But see way years ago you didn't have the agenda, it could have been there, but we didn't have one. Then all the quorum, some writ came down the tube later I think that was passed, but see at one time all the commissioners could get together some place and there wouldn't be anything wrong it. But now, if there are that many left usually one of them has to get away from there because they would be accused of having a quorum, break it down to two, just different junk like that.

JACKSON: Tell me about Jim Fonteno, he beat Jamie Bray.

McCAIN: Yeah. It was a hard fight for him though, but it was going to happen, after they got to rolling Jamie and the judge went. They were considered one. There was a lot of people working against them. Chapman and his whole bunch got busy there and they, I don't know.

JACKSON: They helped out?

McCAIN: Yes.

JACKSON: In the election. Jim Fonteno was commissioner for a long time.

McCAIN: Yes, he was. But he didn't want it and his wife Jo Anne, they had just gotten married. She certainly didn't want to get involved in a race, but Chapman and there are some others that just flat told him that he was going to do it. He had been a municipal court judge in Baytown at one time. He had been on the Port Commission and he pretty well had some connections. That made it easier for him to run with that support that he had.

JACKSON: That's understandable. Well, what about the sheriffs. I have had people who are interested in Johnny Klevenhagen[55] and Jack Heard ask about them. So if you could maybe give your comments on those two men.

McCAIN: Johnny Klevenhagen was the son of Texas Ranger Johnny Klevenhagen[56]. I knew his father. He and Buster Kern ran together and they were supposed to be the crime busters of Harris County, taken as a team. They were real good. Also strange, there is always somebody around with publicity that could tell about it, too. The old

[55] John J. Klevenhagen, Jr., Sheriff, Harris County Sheriff's Office, 1985 - 1995
[56] John J. Klevenhagen, Sr., Captain, Texas Rangers, 1941 - 1958

man was real good. He just had a good family. Little Johnny, see when I talk like that, I remember little Johnny when he was small too, so anyway, he decided at one time, as a matter of fact, he decided to run for sheriff against Jack Heard and prior to that, the only thing I can think of is that Johnny was just an overgrown boy to me. He was really good, good hearted.

I will tell you this, at one time in the Criminal Courts Building, at the basement level, that is where they brought the prisoners in for the old jail there. There are parking spots down there reserved for like the members of the court, myself and all, but also there was a wash rack there and anytime that I pulled in the morning I would get out of the car, leave the keys and they would automatically wash that car and park it in my spot. Which that was a pretty good perk back then too. But we got to where Johnny was a deputy. I think he made captain. Gus George was the Chief Deputy. The rule was if they came in down there to get their car washed they would stay with their car and move it out because it was so crowded. They just lorded it over those poor old trustees. "By God you take care and park it where you can and do something." We were fed up with it. It would get overcrowded. There was no place to move anything or let anybody else in. Some deputies were coming in and getting their cars washed, going in the cafeteria, getting their girlfriend, all going to eat and all that and then come back. Man, I broke that up real quick. The rule was that you stay with it and you move it out when it's finished. Now if one of us that had parking down there, that rule didn't go.

But anyway, I remember one time I was pretty mad about it, they called me and I went downstairs. You see the deal was that you left the key in the car.

Johnny's car was there. So, I had them drive if off, had the shop follow the man that was driving it, take it down, I think it was down around Leeland and park that sucker on the street and come back and give me the keys. They did that and Johnny was trying to find his car. I told Gus George what I did, I told Johnny, I said, "I tell you what, not unless you can find Gus George, I will give them to Gus George, but I am not going to give them to you and I will tell Gus where it is." Boy, he hated that, because Gus was tearing him up. Anyway, he finally had to, to get his car back. So I gave the keys to Gus George, he gave them to Johnny and they took him down there to get his car.

Well later Johnny's car was down there, but Johnny's office was in the old Marine office over at Caroline and Prairie right across from the Cotton Exchange on the corner there. We rented that for the Detective Bureau. He was in charge of the detectives then. I think he was a Major. His car was down there and I said, "Okay, drive it." Word got out and they said when Johnny heard that it was expected to be moved he jumped out of his chair, ran out of the building and ran all the way down to the basement to get his car. But it is just stuff like that, it sounds silly but you have to do stuff like that to get their attention that you meant business.

JACKSON: Now, as far as the Sheriff's Department was concerned, when you were Building Superintendent, did you have to deal with the federal lawsuits or the ramifications of the lawsuits of the overcrowding?

McCAIN: I wasn't as much involved in that as frankly the Sheriff was because I fell on the fact that the statute said that the county could appoint a Building Superintendent in charge of all the properties except the jails. That specifically fell to the Sheriff. I'd

hide behind that all through there. I was involved in the fact that it was a problem for us and I was expected to have my thinking cap on and try to help out. But as far as getting involved in a lot of testimony on it, I think I was called to testify on some stuff. The jail was real overcrowded. I would go through there on a tour and it would be so crowded and stinking. You can't imagine. You had to be real careful because the walkway was sort of close to the bars and an inmate would just love to take feces and throw it on you. Those deputies put up with a lot like that. It was really overcrowded and it shouldn't have been.

Under Jack Heard, we started at 1301 Franklin. But because of the deal that the Sheriff is in charge of the jails, they have sort of relented, they sort of fell back on the Building Superintendent's department though because I guess they figured we were more reliable on taking care of stuff than say the Sheriff and his people. That's the way, it is confusing now, but as far as I know, that statute still stands and the Sheriff is in charge of his building. That's why Jack Heard, at that time, he pounded into everybody that he was it and he was the authority. That is part of why the jail became messed up like it is. The architects and engineers should have been smart enough to do the right thing instead of doing what that Sheriff wanted done because he didn't know a thing about that.

I do know this story about Jack Heard. In the old jail at 301 [San Jacinto] there was a prisoner that escaped one day. He was up on the roof exercising but he got around the fence someway and he was over on the corner and he was threatening to jump and nobody could get to him. Jack Heard went up there and he was always gimmicking something. He took a nickel out of his pocket and was talking to that

guy and talking about something. The story was that Jack Heard talked this prisoner down with a nickel. Whatever story Jack was telling him it must have had some meaning to it. I don't know what all, but it was good that he was able to do that and keep that man from jumping because we had apparatuses down there and all kind of stuff. We were expecting him maybe to jump.

Jack was good with his storytelling, he was good at doing a lot of things and really making you think that it was believable. Jack he came from the TDC (Texas Department of Corrections). At one time he was Police Chief. His father had been a police chief. Jack was pretty well known. I was with Commissioner Eckels on a few occasions and Jack Heard met us and we were just riding around and they would be talking and most of it I can't even remember because I purposely, I would always put stuff out of mind and I would rather not listen too much because if I got subpoenaed by the court, I could honestly say I don't know. But they were conniving that day, the two of them.

I remember one time Commissioner Eckels landed his helicopter over on the top of the 1301 jail. He was demanded to get in and he couldn't understand why all those guys had their guns drawn and all came out and he had to get off that roof. He was telling them, "I'm Commissioner Eckels." They didn't care who he was.

I can remember stuff about Jack Heard, Buster Kern even back then. They were crime fighters. When Jack came in one reason he was used to the prison system and we had a lot more prisoners. As a matter of fact under Buster Kern, that is where that jail at Atascocita was built. I think we had about 600 acres of land out there and the prisoners were going to farm it. The right idea was they were going to grow food

for the inmates. All of a sudden it came out from a federal court ruling you couldn't make them work, so they weren't going to work. That's why that collapsed out there. Actually that facility was a real bad facility. We dug a big retention pond out there; the sewer would run in that and hope that it would evaporate. If we had a good rain it overflowed and was going right down that creek to the bayou. That happened for a good while. There was one time we had a lot, I say there was two, maybe three alligators in there. One of them was king size, he was a big one. I think we got Texas Parks and Wildlife to take them at one time and get rid of them for us. That wasn't until we were shutting that down and putting our own sewer plant in. We always had our own water well.

JACKSON: Tell me about Carl Smith. He was the Tax Assessor in Harris County for an awfully long time.

McCAIN: Well Carl Smith of course he was a good storyteller and he had beau coups of people being the tax collector here and the right people had the money to help keep him office. He knew how to be a friend to them like the automobile dealers and all kind of stuff like that. He was always working on ideas to maybe help them out. Maybe not violate the law but he was working on stuff to always try to help them out.

He was in the old Criminal Courts Building. As you go in the door he was right to the right and all that first floor belonged to the Tax Office. When you would go in that door to his lobby from the building lobby there were some counters, but he always had a stool sitting out there and he sat on that stool an awful lot during the day and as people were coming in he would holler, "Hi, how are you?" He would get up and shake their hand and say, "I'm Carl Smith." That stool was his trademark to me

over there. You always expected to see him sitting on that stool. If I wanted to do any business I could do it with him sitting on the stool but some of it we would just on back in his office and do it. I know he got just about what he wanted in the county for his Tax Office because he was revenue producing and he let the court know that quite often. He got just about what he wanted.

We bought that old bank building in Pasadena, Annex 4, that was originally bought for Carl Smith for the Tax Office. When we bought it nobody cared because he was the one after it. Coincidentally, we were shutting down the Annex that was over on La Porte Expressway, Annex 1, and all of a sudden they were looking for spots over there to put the judge, Thompson at that time and Larkin was the constable. All of a sudden everybody said, "Wait a minute, just put them in that bank building." So that's the way they got into that bank building. There were some pretty good plans going to get another building built for them over there, but it fell through since we already had the bank building for Carl Smith. Something that tickled me was that some JP later was telling me how they let the Tax Office use that space over there. I said, "No you didn't, he let y'all use his space."

Carl Smith was just unique in his political style. I remember that every time I turned around, there was something that Carl Smith wanted. It just so happened that if Carl Smith wanted it he was going to get it. I got mad one day and I told him, "Man, you're asking for all that. Good gosh, don't you know how much I have already done for you?" He looked at me and he said, "Well Mac, what have you done for me today?" That was his attitude, didn't do anything today. We argued a lot, as a matter of fact, he would be having a staff meeting sometime and I would walk by the

door and he would get long winded in his staff meetings, he just liked to have everybody sitting there listening to him. I'd walk by the door and he would say, "Come on in here." So I would go on in there and then he and I would start arguing and finally he would say, "Y'all go on," and they would tell me later, "Boy, we are glad you came by, he was keeping us in there for a long time and we had other stuff to do."

He helped initiate the pension plan, he worked on that, he was good at stuff like that, looking out for the employees. Sometimes you'd think he would be criticized, he had a lot of contract people working for him, but he gave them an account to pay them out of without having it on his payroll. That was out of his services. Also it gave somebody a job. Really, that was a vote getter for him because he hired just about anybody to work those jobs to get them on the payroll. They were beholding to him and they were good friends of his. They became real good friends.

I don't see any of that type politics going on these days. You have the scrutiny of the press now and it is strange to me that all they are digging into is the dirt. Back then you had what we call the Houston *Press*, not this one that you see now, but back in the old days it was comparable to the *Post* and the *Chronicle*. You had some *Press* reporters that would really dig into stuff. That was good, but the *Chronicle* and the *Post* they would try to look for the good stuff to print most of the time except when it was real drastic. Squatty would never call the *Press* and give them a story, but if their reporter was sitting in the courtroom and they were paying attention, any of them were paying attention, some remarks that he would make in court would make them go and search that out and they would find a story. So he had

a way of passing it. It was amazing, a lot of times I would hear him saying some stuff and I would wonder, "Wait a minute, what's that," and I would realize he is trying to feed a story to them.

JACKSON: They would pick up on it and go.

McCAIN: Like he said in his later days, "You don't have any reporters that have enough sense to pick up on it now." And they didn't. I don't think they have them now. They are always going in the back room and trying to dig up whatever dirt they can find what's wrong. There is 95 percent good going on and maybe 5 percent bad going on. They don't pay enough attention to the good that is going on as far as I am concerned. That is the reporters and their newspapers. Of course the good stuff doesn't sell papers.

JACKSON: Well, there is that argument. Speaking of good things and bad things. What about Commissioner Bob Eckels? He ran into some problems.

McCAIN: Really, I know he ran into some problems, but I never had a problem with him. Really for some reason he was always such a good friend of mine. I closed my eyes and ears to what was going on, because a lot of it I didn't believe. It's hard to say because of some other people. A lot of that stuff that he was accused of just like those bridge timbers became so important; they were nothing but debris and leftovers. From what I heard, and you have to realize that I never did care to go into research and into this deeply because somebody would ask me on the bench or witness stand, I could easily say, "I don't know," I just didn't want to know. I just wanted to take care of my job. From what I understand he wanted those timbers and he specifically had a change order put in so that the timbers would be saved for Precinct 3. Usually

when you are demolishing something the contractor has the say over who takes it out. It's on them. He could have easily gone to that contractor without that change order and just told the contractor, "Man, I would like to salvage some of those for a place I've got," and it would have been clean and all that. The contractor or some of his friends could have probably hauled them up there. The way he did it, sometimes you are so smart though you outsmart yourself and he was a very smart man. A few things like that. But see, Bob Eckels was a good friend of mine and I have a hard time faulting him.

JACKSON: Would you say that the kinds of things that he was getting in trouble with, that people were trying to pin on him was just standard practices of the day? Were other people doing the same kind of things?

McCAIN: Not to the extent of getting a change of contract and pinpointing that deal, there would be hell turned over to him. Quietly, a lot of times you were doing a demo and you had debris or leftovers or whatever, it was nothing for the contractor to maybe make a deal to give it to somebody. Because it was there and a lot of times it kept them from having to haul it off. It was no good but it was good for somebody else that wanted it.

To illustrate a story, we were having to exchange all the fire hoses in the Civil Courts Building. There was a time element on the hoses that were old enough to be in there that we had to just go through and change them out. So the hoses were laying down there going to the dump. A bailiff came over to me at my office and wanted me to give him some of those hoses. I said, "I can't do it," and he got real mad at me because he was going to take them down to the boats and use them for fenders on

boats. He was telling me how good they could be for something like that. I said, "I realize that, but I don't have the authority to give it to you, but they are going to the dump." I kept repeating, "They are going to the dump." Had he gone in there and picked up some of them none of us would have stopped him. My people if they tried to stop him would say, "That's trash going to the dump."

JACKSON: Or if he had followed the truck to the dump.

McCAIN: That's right. I kept trying to emphasize that, but I couldn't tell him to do that because I couldn't afford to have him say, "McCain told me to do it." I didn't have the authority to give that to him.

On another occasion we had a ladder that was thrown in our dump at the Criminal Courts Building. I saw it and it had been repaired some way but I decided that's a lawsuit, it needs to go to the dump. This poor young fellow that was real active in his church and did maintenance work around his church came up to my office and he was begging me for that ladder and he had taken it and salvaged it out of the trash and had saved it so that he could get my permission to take it. Now like I said, he was real religious and thought that that was the right thing to do. But I kept telling him, "No, now that's trash and it's got to go to the dump, I do not have the authority to give it to you." I kept repeating strongly and all and he didn't take it and it stayed there for a day or two and I told my shop crew to take it and bust it so it wouldn't be any good to anybody and then send it to the dump. If he had just walked off with it, nobody was going to say anything to him. As a matter of fact, when we bought the old Coffee Pot Building, we had an employee that would get these what

we called weekenders at that time, supposed to be coming down to the jail and do some weekend time.

End of Tape 5 – Side A

Start of Tape 5 – Side B

McCAIN: Okay, on remodeling down there, we were going a little slow on the remodeling so we just had to get it demoed ahead of time. You have to realize back then we didn't have the money and I was working on a pretty slim budget, so using this one employee to watch these weekenders and put them to work down there. I told them that we weren't going to haul it off right then. I said, "Put it out on the dock, the loading dock, and leave it and we will see what happens. If it stays there too long we will eventually haul it off." Everything that came out of there we put on the loading dock and it started disappearing. Somebody would pull a truck up there at nighttime and steal it. They were actually doing me a favor; I didn't have to go to the trouble of hauling it off. It was going to the dump anyway. If it got stolen, I would look pretty silly to file on somebody for stealing from the dump. That's the way I handled that one.

As a matter of fact, another thing that is interesting is at one time we had so many trees at [unintelligible] Park, they were about double the amount that we have now of trees. They needed to be thinned. They weren't growing too well. We were going to cut half of them out. That was the original plan when they were originally planted, to let them grow awhile and then cut a certain number out so they could continue to grow. But there was so much bird mess on that vegetation, down below, it wasn't grass, but whatever it was, it was just a holy mess. I had trustees in there,

and all that stuff was dying from the bird mess. I had them cleaning that out and putting it in plastic bags. I was going to get in trouble if I took it down and dumped it into bayou or even maybe sending it to the dump. I told them to just sit it out there on the sidewalk right by where the meters are. You know what? A lot of district attorney people were pulling down there and getting that and running because it was going to make good fertilizer for them. Boy, it went like that and I didn't have to worry with it. We'd laugh about that, we would see them doing it and just laugh. They would be looking around to see who was watching them. That was the good old days.

JACKSON: Tell me about Judge Lindsay. Jon Lindsay.

McCAIN: Jon Lindsay came into office and, as a matter fact, he beat Elliott in all fairness. Jon Lindsay is a good friend of mine. He might not like hearing this. Elliott beat himself. Lindsay didn't necessarily beat Elliott. Lindsay was real good and played his politics right. He knew what he was doing and he became a real strong leader. He had been a contractor prior to running. He had a company as a matter of fact out at the old Annex 4 in Pasadena when we moved the Pollution Control out there. As a matter of fact, the Pollution Control was where the Family Law Center is and they were trying to demolish that area to build the Law Center. My boss at that time, Charlie Hopping called me and says, "You gotta get some room out there for the Pollution Control." I said, "What?" He says, "Yeah, find it." I said, "Why? How much time have I got?" He said, "They are loaded now and they will be out there tomorrow."

They brought truck load after truck load of junk out. A lot of just junk that he thought was good, he brought out there and some of it we just let it lay out there on the parking lot and out in the open, store it, but it pertained to the lab, but it turned out what all he had wasn't going to do any good and we eventually had to send most of it to the dump anyway. Judge Lindsay had that contract there to remodel that space for the lab and the offices for Pollution Control. I met him back then. There was some drive-in windows underneath. Pollution Control went on the second floor above the drive-in windows there and these booths for the drive-in tellers were down under and they would have to come from upstairs and walk down some stairs to get to the station. It became necessary to enclose that area, concrete it over to make the lab work. So they were going to do it.

We had an old inspector by the name of Stevens. He was a good ole colorful guy, but he like to play his little politics and he would work the contractors and all for free lunches and stuff like that. He was good at that. He was doing favors. Outside those steel stairs going down there, Lindsay had some garage apartments that had wooden stairs and they were going to fit just right there. He wanted them. At that time I had the say over what was kept and what we didn't keep. Steve said, "Well you are going to have to store them." I said, "That's good, I'll store them." He said, "Well where are you going to put them?" I said, "Right down in the hole that they came out of." To this day those metal stairs are still in those drive-in booths out there because we just took them off, put them down in that hole and they are stored down there now and nobody realizes it. Some day when they tear that out they will be wondering what are these doing here. That was why I did it like that. I mostly pretty

well was irritated at Steve. I was getting irritated at what I consider too much free lunches and all that. I don't know, it was just irritating to me and I thought, "No, you ain't going to get those." When I became Building Superintendent, I was a little frightful for a little while, afraid that Lindsay would look at me and say, "Yeah, you got my stairs." I never did hear anything from him. It could be that Judge Lindsay doesn't even remember that and won't remember it. It might have been his superintendent that was working for him on that job that thought he could pull something and make points with Lindsay. I really don't know how it came about, but it tickles me that sometime if we ever demolish those booths out there, they are going to find the stairs down in there.

Lindsay as you know came on and was in office during a heck of a big expansion program and this was during the years that he was here and started just about that time he came in office. Just like the jails. We ran into all kind of problems with that jail, that 1301 Jail. Like I was telling you about revenue sharing, I used to get a lot of it thrown to me, if I had thirteen or twenty million dollars in there, they didn't mind taking that out and putting it toward the jail. I was on a campaign kick for a new Civil Courts Building back then. I remember Judge Lindsay told me one day we are nearly through with the jail, 1301 Jail. He says, "After this you can get the revenue sharing for your courthouse." Low and behold the federal government cut it out about that time. A lot of the revenue sharing went into building that 1301 Jail.

Lindsay was instrumental in getting money from the feds to buy up these park lands along Spring Creek and Cypress Creek out there. That park land was bought

through his efforts and his staff, even on Clear Creek he got those. There was a girl named Judy Opravey that worked that for him real strong. I remember each property they got, the Building Superintendent's office had to build a sign painted with legal terminology, something about where the money came from. They bought some land off Highway 45 and just north of Cypress Creek, off Peter Road on the right going out, it's about 40 acres. It touches the creek but we don't have access to it. Judy said that we had to put a sign. We had to sign letters that the signs had been put there on that land. I sent my crew out there and told them to go do it. They said, "Mr. McCain, we have to go across private property there." I said, "No, you go ahead." I knew the owner of the private property and I knew that I wasn't going to get into any trouble. We had to go right across his land to get to our property to put this sign up and take a picture of it. But that was sort of comical back then. There we are putting a sign up there where nobody would ever see it. To this day that land has never been fully developed. There is some particular reason that the commissioner is holding it back. There are other lands across there. Like Jones Park, they got that land there. He was real instrumental in getting the funds to buy up all that land. He handled the jail and even moving into the 701 Jail, that all came under him, the courthouses and all. There was already movement when Judge Eckels took over.

JACKSON: Do you think that it was Judge Lindsay's building and contractor background that made him interested in those types of projects that helped him move it along?

McCAIN: I imagine so. It very well could be.

JACKSON: So you are really saying that he pretty much spearheaded building and acquisitions move with the county?

McCAIN: Sometime or the other, they had taken the buildings from Squatty and I went under the entire court. He was more or less the spearhead. Everybody knew that if we are going to put it together, we got to get to him and get his help and assistance some way or somehow, so we would do that. There was a lot of growth, the Toll Road, Judge Lindsay was spearheading that. I can't remember the exact project that we were fixing to start on. We had a big meeting in Lindsay's office. I was there and somebody says, "Who's going to tell Squatty?" Lindsay looked over at me and says, "Mac, you're going to tell him." I frowned. He says, "Comes with the territory, that's your job." So I had to tell Squatty, whatever it was, I forget, but it went over real good, nothing happened with that. Everybody knew that I still had a good relationship with Squatty. Squatty was crossways with a lot of members of the court because a lot of stuff that he thought that they were doing were unethical.

JACKSON: Were they?

McCAIN: I don't think so, but in his perception it was. He and Commissioner Fonteno had been friends way before Commissioner Fonteno went into office. Most people don't understand that Commissioner Fonteno and his wife Lucille at the time were very good friends of Fern and Squatty. Whey they wound up getting a divorce, busting up, for some reason Lucille was over there all the time and just kept it stirred how bad Fonteno was. That's my opinion now, because something happened there. You are going to have to excuse my expression, but Commissioner Lyons, instead of saying Fonteno, he got to where he was saying "old Farteno." I was afraid that he was going to say that in open court someday. I know how that happened. I feel I know. A lot of this is just what I think I know. I don't really know for sure what the falling out

was about. But that's what I thought it was. Lucille would call me and tell me just how rotten and sorry Fonteno was all the time.

As a matter of fact, in 1982 when I had open heart surgery, I was in intensive care and could only have visitors for say twenty minutes and they were supposed to be family. They came in and told me that Lucille Fonteno was out there and she said that she was family. I had tubes in me and they said, "Do you want to see her?" I am going like this (shaking his head "no"). I don't know what her reasoning was. Even Squatty and Fern put up with Lucille. Bless her heart, she was a different type person, but they were friends, it was their friend and they had been friends for years.

As a matter of fact, Commissioner Fonteno and Squatty and Fern didn't live very far from them. In the old days before he got in office, Fonteno would walk in and have coffee or maybe breakfast with them, at the Lyons. I will say this, his wife Jo Anne is one of the nicest people I have ever met and frankly she was a Godsend for him. I will say this, she was a political asset to him, they complimented each other. The other way there was just something wrong all the time, it wouldn't have been a good compliment. With Lucille it just wouldn't have worked.

But I know one joke that was going around about Fonteno and Jo Anne, they would wear matching outfits or colors a lot. A lot of time they would be in blue jackets. Remember when they used to have those leisure suits. They would wear stuff like that and all. Squatty and Fern and everybody would say, "Look at the twins, look at them." You know everybody would be just carrying on about the twins. One time when we were at Padre Island for the County Judge and Commissioners Convention, I was able to go along. I caught Squatty and Fern sitting

and they both had the same type shirt color. They matched. I was real good, I was always taking pictures. I took a picture of them and you may see that in the album. I brought it back and I said, "Hello twins."

JACKSON: That's pretty funny. Basically, I guess in conclusion for the oral history, you have seen the county transition from an old style Texas county government to where we are now which is the largest county in Texas. We are a modern government. It functions differently. What do you see that are the similarities between the old system and the new system? What do you see as differences?

McCAIN: Similarities are that as I go along, things coming up, they seem to be maybe larger problems, but basically the same old problems -- trying to get the constituents satisfied and happy. You see a lot of times the prop stuff coming up on court agenda and I say, "It may not be the same thing, but it is similar problems." They stay about the same, those running the government and all, staying the same and having similar problems. Back in the old days they had jail problems. They have had jail problems all along, even before they built this jail over here. There are always jail problems and you have them now. They are just similar and larger.

The difference now is in the government is that I see in the court each one was their own person and their own precinct back then. It is breaking away pretty much. Everybody is just on different agendas. Of course back then in my days they were all Democrats. That may be why they got along better but now you have the Democrats and Republicans. Democrats now are where the Republicans used to be. The Republicans are where the Democrats used to be. That could be a lot to do with the politics. Also there are things that come about that is just, "I want to do this and I

want to get the credit for it." That's why with Lindsay he was strong enough to take over. He was just able to run it. That's the main difference I see. You find too much in the county, there is too much diversity on the problems and different ones are getting into other peoples business. You have some county officials that like to sort of get in the city's business. That was a no-no for years, it has always been a no-no. You're city, we're county. You can stick your nose or say anything about either one of them. You find different ones wanting to think that they can maybe rule or dictate to other. A lot of that problem is the tax bases and all that. You get a lot of complaints. The city likes to stir up by saying people in the city are paying county taxes too. All the roads and bridges they build, but that's not true. The county has the city, but we foot the bill for the entire justice center, the district attorney's office, the courts, we foot the bill for a lot more than what the city has even thought about putting, that argument will get started every once in a while.

JACKSON: Well Mac, what can I say but thank you.

McCAIN: I hope that I haven't rambled too long and too far. I know I get to digressing.

JACKSON: This is wonderful.

End of Tape 5 – Side B

Postscript:

Mac McCain died on February 1, 2006, in Houston, Texas.